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# *Betha Cholmáin maic Luacháin:*

## An Ecclesiastical Microcosm of the Twelfth-Century Irish Midlands

Gavin David Dillon

The following thesis, a work supervised by Professor Máire Herbert, head of *Roinn na Sean-  
na Meán-Ghaeilge* / The Department of Early and Medieval Irish, in which the work was undertaken, is submitted to the National University of Ireland, Cork, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in August 2013.

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## **Research Declaration**

The undersigned hereby declares that the following thesis is the work of the candidate alone, and has not been submitted, either in full or in part, for another degree to the National University of Ireland, Cork, or elsewhere.

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Gavin David Dillon

2013

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Without a shadow of a doubt the current work would not have been even half completed without the unwavering love, support and belief of my parents. Their constant enthusiasm invigorated me innumerable times when I had none. If this thesis has no other merit, it stands as a testament to good parenting.

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My thanks to the staff and students of the Department of Early- and Medieval-Irish, in particular Doctor Kevin Murray. Their wisdom and support have been invaluable.

Many of the maps have been drawn for me by Susan O'Driscoll, a good friend. Any of the flaws are undoubtedly my own inability to express what I wanted accurately. I am indebted to her for bringing the Irish midlands very much to life.

Finally, mention must be made of the twelfth-century community of Lann which produced *Betha Cholmáin*. Whether frustrated or fascinated, I would have nothing without them.

## List of Abbreviations

<i>Aclon</i>	<i>The Annals of Clonmacnoise, being the Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to AD 1408</i> , ed. D. Murphy (Dublin, 1896)
<i>AFM</i>	<i>Annála Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616</i> , 7 vols, ed. J. O'Donovan (Dublin, 1848-51)
<i>ALCé</i>	<i>Annals of Loch Cé: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 1014-1690</i> , 2 vols, ed W.M. Hennessy (London, 1871; repr. Dublin, 1939)
<i>AMCG</i>	<i>Aislinge Meic Con Glinne</i> ed. K. Jackson (Dublin, 1990)
<i>ATig</i>	<i>The Annals of Tigernach</i> , ed. W. Stokes in <i>Revue Celtique</i> xvi (1895), 374-419, xvii (1896), 6-33, 119-263, 337-420, xviii (1897), 9-59, 150-97, 267-303
<i>AU</i>	<i>The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)</i> , ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983)
<i>BCh</i>	<i>Betha Colmáin maic Luacháin</i> , ed. and trans. K. Meyer. (Todd Lecture Series, Dublin, 1911)
<i>BNÉ</i>	<i>Bethada Naem nÉirenn</i> , 2 vols. ed. and trans. C. Plummer, (Oxford, 1922)
<i>CGH</i>	<i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> , i, ed. M.A. O'Brien (Dublin, 1962)
<i>CGSH</i>	<i>Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae</i> , ed. P. Ó Riain (Dublin, 1985)

<i>CS</i>	<i>Chronicum Scotorum. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to AD 1135</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessey (Rolls Series, London, 1905)
<i>DIL</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Irish Language Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials</i> (compact ed., Dublin, 1983)
<i>EIV</i>	<i>The Early Irish Verb</i> , K. McKone (Maynooth, 1987)
<i>Félire Óengusso</i>	<i>Félire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee</i> , ed. and trans. W. Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Society vol xxix) (London, 1905, reprint. Dublin, 1984)
<i>Genealogies</i>	<i>The Great Book of Irish Genealogies</i> , 5 vols, D. Mac Fhirbhisigh, ed. and trans. N. Ó Muraile, (Dublin, 2003)
<i>GOI</i>	<i>A Grammar of Old Irish</i> , R. Thurneysen, tr. D.A. Binchy and O. Bergin (Dublin, 1946, repr. 1998)
<i>IBL</i>	<i>Irish Book Lover</i>
<i>ITS</i>	Irish Texts Society
<i>OG</i>	<i>Onomasticon Goedelicum: Locurum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: an Index, with Identifications, to the Gaelic Names of Places and Tribes</i> , ed. E. Hogan (Dublin/London, 1910)
<i>Tallaght</i>	<i>The Martyrology of Tallaght</i> , ed. R.I. Best and H.J. Lawlor, Henry Bradshaw Society vol lxxviii (London, 1931)
<i>Topography</i>	Walsh, P. ‘The Topography of Betha Colmáin’, <i>Irish Leaders and Learning Through the Ages</i> , ed. N. Ó Muraile (Dublin,



2003)

*VSH*

*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols. ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1910)

*ZCP*

*Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 1897-

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## Introduction

[T]he 'life' of a saint is a paradigm – a paradigm which may change according to circumstances.

- Charles Doherty<sup>1</sup>

[T]he potential of hagiography as a source of knowledge about the early Irish Church has not been fully exploited... Some have concentrated on the source-materials of the hagiographers. Others have concerned themselves with the incidental evidence which the texts supply to historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists... All of these endeavours have contributed to the elucidation of Irish saints' Lives. Yet the treatment of the Lives as reservoirs of information rather than as literary works has been a limiting factor in many instances. The full revelation of hagiographical testimony requires not only the disclosure of the elements comprised within a particular work, but also the critical analyses of the work itself... [E]ach Irish Life is implicitly a source for its own time. It speaks from within the monastic community of which its subject was patron, conveying the attitudes and interests of that community in the manner of its portrayal of the saint's career.

- Máire Herbert<sup>2</sup>

Hagiography is literature about the saints. Most often, this takes the form of a Life structured as a biography, or description of the monastic career of the saint, and the foundation of his (or her) principal church. Hagiography was common throughout continental Europe, and also Ireland and Britain in the early and medieval Christian period. Irish hagiography has its own

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<sup>1</sup> Doherty, 'The Irish Hagiographer: resources, aims, results', 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 2-3.

conventions and motifs, but developed largely from the European tradition.<sup>3</sup> The effort and expense of producing a hagiographic work requires that the reader approach the text as a carefully crafted, and intentional, literary product. While not always perfectly achieved, hagiography nevertheless constitutes a literary genre. As with any other construct, we may get a sense of the author's style, rhythm, sense of humour and sense of the fantastic. Therefore the texts may be read for enjoyment. However, while having elements of biography and history, hagiography is primarily an account of a saint's career, written in a particular context and for particular purposes. Thus, study of Irish hagiography can help to deepen our understanding of the medieval Irish church and its society, elucidating much about Ireland's history. In a sense, it may be 'a goldmine for the historian of social conditions, values and mental horizons'.<sup>4</sup> Attitudes towards hagiography have changed in the last century, this change accelerating greatly in the last twenty-five years or so. Early study of hagiography had developed from belief that hagiographical works were the biographies of the pious men and women of the period of Christianisation of Ireland,<sup>5</sup> to dismissal of the texts as having little value either to history or to literature. Modern scholarship has sought to elucidate what saints' Lives may contribute to our understanding of the early Irish church and its society. It is useful to take account of this society and the circumstances in which a hagiographic text was produced, including the ecclesiastical and political outlook of its author and church, rather than to view it one-dimensionally. To view a hagiographic text as a 'reservoir of information rather than as a literary work'<sup>6</sup> is to neglect the social milieu of its composition.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine *Betha Cholmáin maic Luacháin* (hereafter *BCh*) as a key source of information about a small ecclesiastical community of the Irish midlands in the medieval period. As will be demonstrated, *BCh* seems to have been composed in the

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<sup>3</sup> For recent general works on continental hagiography see, for example: Sticca, *Saints: Studies in hagiography*; Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: history and hagiography, 640-720*; Head, *Medieval Hagiography: an anthology*, Kirsch, *Laudes sanctorum: Geschichte der hagiographischen Versepike vom IV. bis X. Jahrhundert*; Weingarten, *The Saints' Saints: hagiography and geography in Jerome*; Neil, *Seventh century popes and martyrs: the political hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius*; Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*; Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*; Birkett, *The Saints' Lives of Jocelyn of Furness: hagiography, patronage and ecclesiastical politics*.

<sup>4</sup> Doherty, 'The Irish Hagiographer', 10-11

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Maher, *Footsteps of the Irish Saints in the Dioceses of Ireland*.

<sup>6</sup> Doherty, 'The Irish Hagiographer', 10-11.

twelfth century, and was most likely produced at the small ecclesiastical community of Lann. *BCh* is one of the longest hagiographic texts in medieval Irish, comprising of some fifteen folios, its sole copy now contained in MS Rennes 598 at the Bibliothèque de Rennes Metropole. We are fortunate that *BCh* found its way to France and into the safekeeping of Christophe-Paul de Robien during the middle of the eighteenth century. Equally fortunate was the identification of the importance of the Life by James H. Todd in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Following Todd's interest, Kuno Meyer produced his edition in 1911.<sup>8</sup> Yet scholarly concern with Rennes MS 598, and the Life of Colmán therein, diminished thereafter. The most attention paid to *BCh* in the following decades came from Fr. Paul Walsh in the early twentieth century, whose work on the Life focused largely on its onomastic information.<sup>9</sup> The necessary detailed study of the text has not been undertaken.

*BCh* contains matter for several studies, but the present work is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it seeks to illuminate some key issues in the text to provide a platform for further interest and scholarship. It is an initial view of significant areas of interaction between the church of Lann and its ecclesiastical, social and political milieu. An interdisciplinary approach allows for a far wider range of sources to be utilised to help illuminate as fully as possible the information contained within the work. While social and cultural aspects of the text may constitute the focus of this study, linguistic data is also investigated as an aid to identification of its likely period of composition or compilation, and complementary to evidence regarding its social and political testimony. In this way, light is cast on a complex ecclesiastical microcosm in the twelfth-century Irish midlands. Individual, more focused studies on aspects of the Life would be most beneficial to future scholarship.

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<sup>7</sup> Todd, *Some Account of the Irish Manuscript Deposited by President De Robien in the Public Library of Rennes*.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, *Betha Cholmáin maic Luacháin*. In 1999, Meyer's edition was re-released with a modernised version of the translation, but without the Irish text, with a brief introduction by Leo Daly. See Daly, *The Life of Colmán of Lynn, Betha Colmáin Laine*. Dottin also wrote about the Life in the Rennes manuscript; 'Notice du manuscrit Irlandais de la Bibliothèque de Rennes', 79-91.

<sup>9</sup> See Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Colmáin*', reprinted in Ó Muraíle, *Irish Leaders and Learning Through the Ages*, 263-272, and Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath*. Mention of Lann and *BCh* has also been made by MacErlean, 'Betha Colmáin maic Luacháin', 183-93; Kenney, *Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, 295, 438, 444-445, 453; Doherty, 'Some Aspects of Hagiography as a Source for Irish Economic History', 300-328.

The methodology of the research is shaped by the data in the text. In keeping with recent methodological work in the field, a variety of tools will be used to aid investigation,<sup>10</sup> and to show the Life within its genre and wider context. An interdisciplinary approach will bring together strands of literary, cultural, archaeological, onomastic, historical, geographical, genealogical and hagiographical information, with reference to linguistic evidence where appropriate. Using this methodology, the role of *BCh* as a window on Irish society at the time of writing may be revealed. The thesis seeks to illuminate this data as fully as possible, eliciting new material, shedding new light on the text and scrutinising the information under new headings.

The current work seeks to provide a possible template for future studies undertaken on smaller church communities, and is set out in two main sections. The first section seeks to investigate the figure of the saint, his Life, church, the manuscript source, Rennes 598, and the combination of prose and verse in the text. The second section will examine the testimony of the Life regarding the ecclesiastical and secular concerns of the community of Lann, and how these concerns are represented. Evidence regarding the members of this community and their interaction with the church and the wider world is also discussed.

### ***Section 1 – Subject and Text***

How likely is it that Saint Colmán was an historical figure, and what is it that accords him the title of ‘saint’? It seems that aspects of Colmán’s genealogy, feast-day and final resting place, Lann, provide the necessary tools with which the hagiographer constructs his saintly

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, see: Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer*; Geary, ‘Humiliation of Saints’, 123-40; Herbert, *Iona, Kells and derry*; P. Ó Riain, *Beatha Bharra, Saint Finbarr of Cork: the complete Life*; Kehnel, *Clonmacnoise – the Church and Lands of St. Ciarán: change and continuity in an Irish monastic foundation*; Carey, Herbert and Ó Riain, eds. *Saints and Scholars: studies in Irish hagiography*; Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints: how Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare built christianity in barbarian Europe*.

protagonist.<sup>11</sup> Investigation of these can shed new light on the figure of Colmán, his intended role within the community, presented via his Life, and the claims to his saintly status. By comparing these three key saintly aspects of Colmán with other hagiographic material, it is possible to suggest sources with which the hagiographer of *BCh* was familiar, and was perhaps influenced by. One version of the genealogy of Colmán depicts him as a member of Clann Cholmáin, one of the most influential ruling groups of the midlands in the medieval period. However, there seems to be some confusion regarding genealogical details in *BCh*. Can any of the variant lineages hold any historical value? To what extent may they have been fabricated, and why? By investigating Lann as the final resting place of Colmán, it is possible to give some measure of its function as the principal church of the saint. Its appearance in historical sources, together with archaeological data will help to provide additional detail to the history of this small midlands church.

The sole copy of *BCh* in Rennes 598 is bound together with other Irish, largely religious, material. An account of the history of the text, as it survives at Rennes, will be provided. Along with a description of the manuscript as whole, there is examination of the inclusion of *BCh* in it. A review of the language and internal evidence to ascertain the most likely date of composition follows. The text may then be viewed as a literary construct. *BCh* is not structured with a firm chronology. The text's compositional data will be investigated, and findings may be advanced regarding the author's sources and *modus operandi*. These sources may also illuminate whether an earlier Life, or corpus of material relating to the saint, was available to the hagiographer, or whether *BCh* is an entirely new work. As a prosimetric work, the role of verse will also be considered in investigation of the date of its composition and whether this date may agree with the likely date of the prose. Questions of authorship and of the intended function of the verse will also be considered.

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<sup>11</sup> Delahaye noted a saint's final resting place and his feast day as two of the key *coordonnées hagiographiques*. See Delahaye, *Cinq leçons sur la method hagiographique*, 13-17. Grosjean would add the saint's lineage to the list, particularly in a Celtic context. See Grosjean, 'Notes d'hagiographie celtique', 379-418, at 389.

## *Section 2 – Concerns of Lann in BCh*

A number of churches are mentioned in the Life as being founded by the saint. An investigation of circumstances surrounding each of these churches, together with identification, where possible, of their locations, allows some conclusions to be drawn about the likely historicity of these churches and, by extension, the *paruchia* of Lann. Following identification of church foundations, what other elements of the Life offer insight into the founder's position in the community? Can one detect a familiarity on the part of the author of *BCh* with other hagiographical works? Numerous other saintly figures play roles in the Life. If these saintly figures represent their ecclesiastical foundations, what can this tell us about the relationship between Lann and these churches? What is the basis of the ecclesiastical and political information supplied by the text? How did Lann view itself in relation to the other churches of the Irish midlands in the twelfth century?

In early twelfth-century Ireland, the interests of church and state were closely linked. Numerous secular figures from the seventh to the eleventh centuries play roles in *BCh*. Some are local rulers, while others were far more influential. Foremost among the latter are members of the southern Uí Néill, whose twelfth-century descendants, Clann Cholmáin, were kings of Mide. What was the rationale for the inclusion of such powerful figures in *BCh*? What was the relationship between Lann and less influential local kings? What information does the Life provide regarding the secular politics of the midlands, and how these related to Lann?

One of the key elements of *BCh* appears to involve transfer of property and tribute to Lann from local secular rulers and their overlords. It appears on first reading that Lann's claims are too excessive to have a basis in reality, given its apparently limited influence. Close reading of these claims to property and wealth helps to identify context, and geographical situation. The likely historicity and extent of these claims and the likely influence of Lann at the time of *BCh*'s composition can be assessed. New maps of this sphere of influence, together with maps which show Lann's position within the wider ecclesiastical community, will also be provided.



The role of the saint in his community is also addressed. Miraculous episodes not only confer saintly authority on Colmán, but serve as a reminder to the intended audience of the Life of the constant presence of the saint in society. What types of miracles are presented in the Life, and what are their outcomes? Often, it seems that miracles were used as a vehicle to claim wealth, but this is not always the case. Why might this be? The relics of the saint, often left as a testimony of miracles, are also investigated. What purpose do the relics serve? How does the role of relics in the Life compare with that in other hagiographical texts?

Using an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the content of *BCh*, and to elucidate the history and social milieu of Lann, provides a far more detailed picture of a small ecclesiastical community in the Irish midlands than has hitherto been available to us. It is hoped that the current work will provide new information and detail on *BCh* and on the church community which produced it.

# Section 1: Subject and Text

## Chapter 1 – The Coordinates of the Life of Saint Colmán

It is impossible to say if Colmán mac Luacháin was an historical figure. If such a man existed, what biographical details remain which are subsumed into hagiography, and present the saint according to the conventions and concerns of hagiography. In the second quarter of the twentieth century, Hippolyte Delehaye<sup>12</sup> set forth the two key *coordonnées hagiographiques* which authenticated the status of a saint: a calendar record commemorating the saint's death and records identifying the place of his burial. These 'coordinates' have been accepted as showing the *bona fides* of a European saint. Professor Pádraig Ó Riain<sup>13</sup> notes that Paul Grosjean<sup>14</sup> would add records of the saint's lineage to this list of 'coordinates', especially in an Irish context. *BCh* (§2) places its subject's death on the seventeenth of June, and notes his place of burial as his principal church of Lann meic Luacháin (§96). As for the other important coordinate of sanctity, genealogical data certainly plays a significant role in the presentation of Colmán as a saint of some import. These three 'coordinates' are investigated in turn hereafter.

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<sup>12</sup> Delehaye, *Cinq leçons sur la method hagiographique*, 13-17.

<sup>13</sup> Ó Riain, *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae*, xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Grosjean, 'Notes d'hagiographie celtique', 389.

## 1.1 Genealogical Information

*Indistir andso ní dia genelaig collaidi 7 dia fertaib...* ‘Here is told something of his genealogy according to the flesh, and of his wonders...’ (§3)

The use of genealogies in hagiographical texts serves a number of purposes. Practically every Irish saint’s Life will offer some account of its subject’s descent, in a context of general concern with recording such details in medieval Irish society.<sup>15</sup> Ó Riain has noted that most of these Irish saints’ genealogies were fictional, but that they nevertheless contribute significantly to our knowledge of the saint. He further notes that locality is an intrinsically important part of this pedigree.<sup>16</sup> The genealogy of the saint casts much light ‘on the affiliations of those regarded as his successors. The saint’s real origins are generally not discoverable by means of his pedigree and ... examination shows that considerations of cult and not of person are likely to be involved’.<sup>17</sup> Is this applicable to *BCh*?

Scant evidence remains to shed light on the figure of Saint Colmán. Apart from the twelfth-century Life, there is little by way of information that can be used to identify an historical character, if such existed, or indeed to fill in some of the blanks relating to the ecclesiastical centre at Lann in Westmeath. Consideration of the genealogical information provided by the Life must keep firmly in mind the contemporary context in which the author is working. An attempt to rationalise these genealogies into an historical reality would be to lose sight of their general purpose. Indeed, it is the inaccuracies which provide most commentary on the Life and those who produced it.

Three genealogies are provided in the Life of Colmán by the author (§4-6). Two pertain to his patrilineage (§4, 5), one of which is said to be his *genealogia vera*, or true genealogy (§5). The third lineage given is that of his mother, Lassar. The first genealogy provided for Colmán

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<sup>15</sup> Ó Riain, *CGSH*, introd. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* xv.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* xv-xvi.

names him as son of Luachán, son of Leda, son of Maine, son of Fergus Cerrbél, son of Conall Cremthainne, son of Níall Noígiallach. This shows the great-grandfather of the saint as Maine, a brother of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, the sixth -century ruler of Tara.<sup>18</sup> By extension, this reveals that Colmán is a cousin of Conall Guthbinn mac Suibne, the seventh-century king of the Uí Néill midlands dynasty, who plays an important role in *BCh*<sup>19</sup>. This genealogy may have been the received version previous to the composition of the Life as the hagiographer adds a *genealogia vera*, implicitly the ‘official’ account, which supersedes the former. In the ‘true genealogy’, Colmán’s great-grandfather, Maine, was a son of Diarmait Derg mac Colmáin Máir, eponymous ancestor of Clann Cholmáin, the ruling dynasty of the midlands from around the eighth century.<sup>20</sup> This variant on the genealogical line presents Colmán as a direct descendant of Colmán Már, rather than a more removed cousin. As is discussed in chapter 5.2 ‘Lann and the Uí Néill’, given the foundation’s seemingly increasing frustration with Clann Cholmáin during the eleventh century, the hagiographer may have seen it prudent to include an updated genealogy which linked the saint more directly to this influential family. Thus, increased favour may have been garnered from a group which could easily have ignored a small ecclesiastical foundation which, as will be shown, was relatively inconsequential in the wider scheme of midland’s monastic power.

The role of Conall Guthbinn in *BCh* emphasises that he is a contemporary of the saint. However, according to the second version of the genealogy, there are four generations separating Colmán from Colmán Már, with only one between Conall Guthbinn and Colmán Már, his grandfather.<sup>21</sup> The annals mention a Maine mac Cerbaill, brother to Diarmait and king of Mide before him which corresponds neatly with the ‘original’ genealogy provided for Colmán.<sup>22</sup> The seventeenth-century genealogical opus by Dubaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh identifies Maine, grandfather to Colmán, as Maine son of Diarmait, grandson of Fergus Cerrbél.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Mac Fhirbhisigh may not have been borrowing directly from

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<sup>18</sup> Obit is given in AU s.a. 565.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 5.2 ‘Lann and the Uí Néill’.

<sup>20</sup> Colmán’s obit is given by AU s.a. 555 or 558. For a discussion on the rise to power of the Clann Cholmáin see Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 87-105, especially at 87-88.

<sup>21</sup> See the genealogies of Clann Cholmáin in Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 281-282 and O’Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, 159, 143 bc 50-51; p 425, 335 d 43-50.

<sup>22</sup> AU s.a. 538; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 282.

<sup>23</sup> Mac Fhirbhisigh, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, 708, vol ii, 704.1.

*BCh* here. This same entry also disagrees with the *Life* on the subject of the saint's grandfather. In *BCh* he is named as Leda, but Mac Fhirbhisigh has Léigho (with other variants given as Laeguín or Áeda Luind). Colmán of Lann is also given what may be another variant pedigree in Mac Fhirbhisigh.<sup>24</sup> Mac Fhirbhisigh's records suggest that he may have had access to sources other than those of the author of *BCh*.<sup>25</sup>

The variant genealogies are presented below, beginning at the point of divergence.

*Fig. 1 – Variant genealogies of Colmán*

genealogia 1	genealogia vera	Mac Fhirbhisigh
Conall Cremthainne	Conall Cremthainne	Conall Cremthainne
Fergus Cerrbél	Diarmait mac Cerbaill	Fergus Cerrbél
	Colmán Már	
	Diarmait Derg	
Maine	Maine	Maine
Leda	Leda	Áodh Luind
Luachán	Luachán	Luadán
Colmán	Colmán	Colmán

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 708, vol ii, 704.2.

<sup>25</sup> See also Ó Riain, *CGSH*, 5, 12.0; 86, 662.63.

MacErlean claimed the *genealogia vera* to be the most accurate, with the exception of the inclusion of Diarmait Derg.<sup>26</sup> However, more recent scholarship on saints' genealogies renders this line of thought a little *passé*.<sup>27</sup> The rewriting of the genealogy in *BCh* is surely a response to political aims of the church at Lann. Given that Mac Fhirbhisigh provides quite a different version of this genealogy from sources of which the author of *BCh* does not seem to have been aware, an assertion that one genealogical line is more likely than another must be called into doubt. To deduce a definitive genealogy which historically locates each of the figures, including Luachán, father of the saint, presupposes the historicity of the saint and his family. I would suggest that a 'traditional' genealogy, predating the author's *genealogia vera*, placed the ancestors of the saint as descendants of Fergus Cerrbél or Níall Noígíallach. The subsequent genealogy, proposing that Colmán was a direct descendant of Colmán Már, of Clann Cholmáin, seems likely to be a fabrication designed to imbue the patron of Lann with local authority and greater social status.

The claim by MacErlean that Maine had to be the son of Fergus Cerrbél in order for the saint to have existed at a time contemporaneous with figures mentioned in the Life must be revised. Figures in the Life attested in the eighth century, such as Fidmuine Úa Súanaig,<sup>28</sup> are shown as being contemporaneous with Colmán (§42, 75). There is explicit mention of a sixth-century Bishop Etchén<sup>29</sup> baptising the saint (§10). The same Bishop Etchén is presented as stating that the saint's life will span a hundred and forty seven years (§11). We must be aware that figures depicted in the Life fulfil a thematic role. The author, to further his hagiographical purposes, portrays Colmán as coming into contact with notable figures of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, though the general timeframe of the Life may be seventh century. The extended timeframe of the Life is 'justified' through the statement by Bishop Etchén on the longevity of the saint (§11). Thus, linear chronology becomes far less important in the context of creating hagiographical episodes tailored for a particular context and a particular purpose.

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<sup>26</sup> MacErlean, 'Betha Colmáin maic Luacháin', 187-188.

<sup>27</sup> Ó Riain, *CGSH*, introd. xiv-xvii.

<sup>28</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 757.

<sup>29</sup> Obit in AU s.a. 578 or 584.

The genealogy of Colmán's mother, Lassar, presents her as a daughter of Caech Rolach, of a line of the Uí Fhiachrach of Connacht. The Life traces her lineage back to Fiachra, son of Maine, son of Brion, son of Echu Mugmedón (§5). A note in the margin of Mac Fhirbhisigh's genealogies of the Uí Fhiachrach corresponds exactly with the information supplied in the Life.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that Mac Fhirbhisigh knew of no other genealogy for the figure of Lassar. That the saint's mother is presented as coming from Connacht may demonstrate further connections. Lann was not far from the Mide-Connacht border,<sup>31</sup> and the name Lassar was common in both secular and ecclesiastical society. However, if the saint's mother was descended by thirteen generations from Echu Mugmedón, then the timeframe for Colmán's life would necessarily be much later than that posited by his father's lineage, even if some of the figures which seem to be confused are removed.<sup>32</sup> The maternal line is evidently traced to add greater authority to the saint, but if the author intended to portray his subject as having connections with the Uí Fhiachrach of Connacht, then he does not emphasise this point for the remainder of the Life. There seems to be no clear reference to Connacht or its population groups in *BCh*, or else details of significance are now obscure.

Further incidental information identifies local family groups around Lann, said to be descended from the uncles of Colmán. The Uí Mancháin and the Uí Maíl Umai are descended from Colmán's uncle, Anfossaid (§36). The Uí Lechit of Lann, are from his uncle, Lechet, while his third uncle, Cummaíne, is noted as the progenitor of the Meic Airechtaigh, who are said to hold the position of *airchinnech* of Lann (§37). Thus, by showing that Colmán is a direct descendant of Colmán Már in the *genealogia vera*, the author also cleverly weaves these local families, related to the saint, into the extended Clann Cholmáin network, as is demonstrated following.

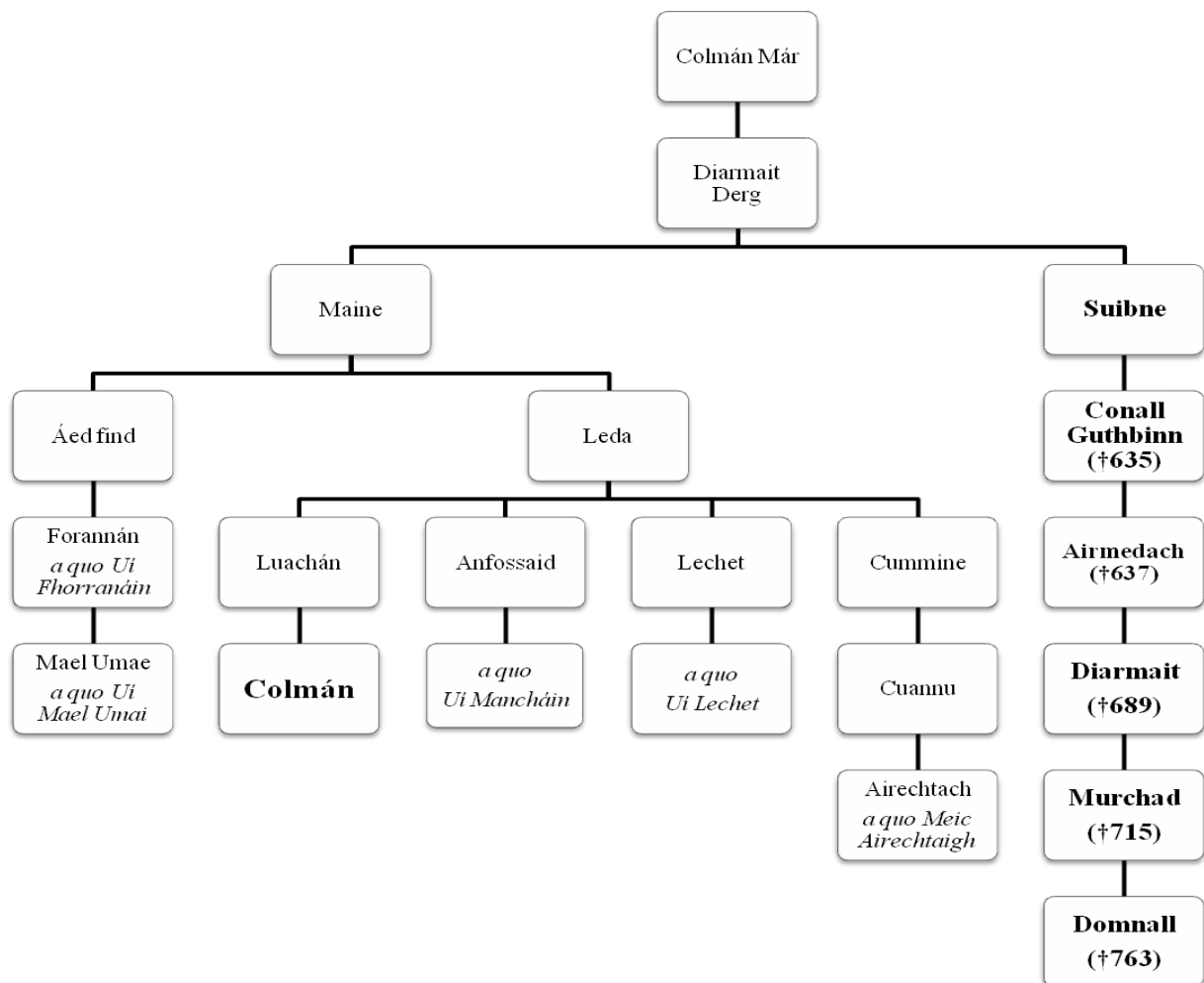
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<sup>30</sup> Mac Fhirbhisigh, *Genealogies*, 676, vol. 1, 296.1.

<sup>31</sup> Lann is about twenty-five miles east of the border, which is the River Shannon.

<sup>32</sup> In the Life, Fiachra is named as son of Maine and Brion (§5) when he is more accurately recorded as being their brother in O'Brien, *CGH*, 147, 142 a 13. This still leaves a gap of eleven generations between Lassar and Echu Mugmedón. Following any of the lineages of Echu, no more than six generations are necessary to reach the seventh century. See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 298.

Fig. 2 – The Lineage of Colmán (Figures on the right are of the Uí Néill Royal Line)



Viewing the genealogical information contained within the Life as a part of the whole construct, the audience is presented with a saintly figure, Colmán, and his extended family, clearly linked to the Southern Uí Néill by the author's *genealogia vera*. This depicts the saint as a direct descendant of Colmán Már, eponymous ancestor of the Clann Cholmáin, ruling dynasty of Mide.



## 1.2 Martyrological Information

*Is ann immurgu celebrait na Cristaidi líth 7 forathmet indí Colmáin maic Lúacháin in cindecim calneiúil aróí laithi míss gréne, isin laithi-sea indnú araóí lathe sechtmaine isin blíadain frecnairc-si.* ‘It is on the fifteenth of the calends of July, according to the day of the solar month, on this day of the week in the present year, that the Christians celebrate the feast and commemoration of Colmán son of Luachan.’ (§2)

References to Colmán in Irish martyrological sources, or more often their notes, generally agree that June seventeenth is the date of the saint’s feast (which is corroborated by the Life (§2)). This date is given in the Martyrologies of Tallaght,<sup>33</sup> Donegal,<sup>34</sup> Cashel,<sup>35</sup> Drummond,<sup>36</sup> *Félire Óengusso*,<sup>37</sup> *Félire Uí Ghormáin*<sup>38</sup> and possibly the Martyrology of Usuard.<sup>39</sup> Of those which do not post-date the Life,<sup>40</sup> the significant texts are the Martyrology of Tallaght and *Félire Óengusso*, possibly a metrical version of Tallaght.<sup>41</sup> An outline of martyrological entries relating to Colmán, and the sources for these entries, is provided hereafter.

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<sup>33</sup> Best and Lawlor, *The Martyrology of Tallaght*: June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Todd and Reeves, *The Martyrology of Donegal*: June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Ó Riain, *Four Irish Martyrologies: Drummond, Turin, Cashel, York*, 179, June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 71, June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Stokes, *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*: June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Stokes, *Félire hUí Gormáin: The Martyrology of Gorman*: June 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Dubois, *Le martyrologe d’Usuard*. Professor Ó Riain has noted that Colmanus, mentioned under June 18<sup>th</sup>, is more likely to be Colmán mac Luacháin than Colman of Druim Lias, *Four Irish Martyrologies*, 71, note 2.

<sup>40</sup> It has been noted by Ó Riain that the Martyrology of Drummond has been derived from the notes to *Félire Óengusso* (*Four Irish Martyrologies*, 15). Likewise, the Martyrology of Cashel may have been derived from a no longer extant version of the *Félire* (*Four Irish Martyrologies*, 167). *Félire Uí Ghormáin* was most likely compiled in the latter part of the twelfth century, see Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies*, 148-149. The Martyrology of Donegal was compiled in the seventeenth century, principally by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh (Ó Riain, *Feastdays*, introd. xxiii).

<sup>41</sup> Ó Riain, *Feastdays*, introd. xxiii.

*Fig. 3 – Attestation of Colmán in the Martyrological Sources which Predate BCh*

	feast-day	Note	source
<b>Martyrology of Tallaght</b>	June 14 <sup>th</sup>	Colmán mac Luacháin mentioned in main text	Brussels 5100-04
	June 17 <sup>th</sup>	Colmán mac Luacháin mentioned in main text.	Brussels 5100-04
<b>Féilire Óengusso</b>	March 30 <sup>th</sup>	Colmán mac Luacháin mentioned in the notes to this date	Rawlinson B 505
	May 24 <sup>th</sup>	Reference in the notes to the three ‘great Colmán’s of Meath’	Laud 610
	June 17 <sup>th</sup>	Metrical reference in text to Moling. Colmán is mentioned in notes to this date	Laud 610
	November 1 <sup>st</sup>	Colmán mac Dimma and Crónán	Rawlinson B 505

### 1) *Martyrology of Tallaght*

Entries for Colmán mac Luacháin in the ninth-century<sup>42</sup> Martyrology of Tallaght are found under June fourteenth and June seventeenth.<sup>43</sup> Under the earlier date, Colmán mac Luacháin is given, while Colmain meic Luac[h]áin is given for the latter. The majority of the Martyrology of Tallaght is preserved in the Book of Leinster, but certain sections are missing. Entries from May twenty-first until the end of July constitute one of these sections, which include both June entries for Colmán. In the edition of the Martyrology,<sup>44</sup> the missing sections are supplied by a copy of the Book of Leinster text assigned to the seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup> Supposing this is an accurate copy from the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, which in turn is an accurate copy of the ninth-century original, it may be possible to infer that the *Tallaght* reference to Colmán mac Luacháin is significant as the only mention of the saint in a source which predates the twelfth-century *Life*.<sup>46</sup> Lann meic Luacháin is mentioned in an annal reference from the tenth century, but Colmán, its patron, is not referenced.<sup>47</sup> However, the existence of so many copies of the feastday notice necessitates caution. The other martyrological source which predates *BCh*, *Féilire Óengusso*, contains references to Colmán in the notes only.

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<sup>42</sup> Ó Riain, *Feastdays*, introd. xxiii. Ó Riain asserts that the Martyrology of Tallaght was compiled in about 830, *Féilire Óengusso* following soonafter.

<sup>43</sup> Numerous feastdays for saints by the name of Colum, its variant, Colmán, and hypocoristic, Mocholmhóg, are recorded in June. E.g. Colmán / Mocholmóc of Dromore (June seventh) and Colum Cille (June ninth). This may have been a reason for the confusion which seems to surround the ‘original’ feast of Colmán mac Luacháin. It is possible that the June date is a product of borrowed or shared traditions relating to a saint of the same name. However, this argument does not necessarily provide adequate grounds to suggest a synonymous past tradition. See for example the discussion of Colmán of Dromore and Colum Cille in Herbert, ‘Saint Colmán of Dromore and Inchmahome’, 262-263

<sup>44</sup> Best and Lawlor, *Tallaght*.

<sup>45</sup> The copy of the Martyrology of Tallaght in the Book of Leinster has a section detached from it which now survives as Franciscan MS A 3. This section now lacks several leaves, including the Martyrological text for January 30<sup>th</sup> to March 10<sup>th</sup>, May 21<sup>st</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>, and November 1<sup>st</sup> to December 16<sup>th</sup>. A manuscript now surviving as Brussels 5100-04 is a copy of the Book of Leinster text made in 1627 by Míché(a)l Ó Cléirigh, before the A 3 section was detached. References to Colmán are on folio 11. The Brussels copy appears to be an abbreviated version of a previous copy which no longer survives. The fact that both entries for Colmán on June 14<sup>th</sup> and June 17<sup>th</sup> seem to note the name of his father, Luachán, indicates that it is Colman of Lann meic Luacháin that is in question. However, it is possible that the contractions used in the Brussels MS refer to a separate figure. See Best and Lawlor, *Tallaght*, introd. ix-x and Herbert, ‘The Hagiographical Miscellany in Franciscan Manuscript A 3’, 124-125

<sup>46</sup> On the likely date of composition of *BCh*, see Chapters 2.3 and 2.4 *infra*.

<sup>47</sup> See AFM s.a. 929: *Mael Brighde mac Feadacáin abb Lanne meic Luachain*. However AFM were compiled between the years 1632 and 1636. See AFM, introd. xi-xii.

## 2) *Félire Óengusso*

In identifying Colmán's feast-day (§2), the author of *BCh* alludes to the *Félire*, stating that this source calls Colmán *an dos óir úas críchaib* 'the golden bush over borders', and *an grían án úas túathaib* 'the splendid sun over tribes'. However, the quatrain for June seventeenth in the *Félire* does not make reference to Colmán at all, but rather its subject is Moling Luachra.<sup>48</sup> Colmán is mentioned in the Laud 610 copy of the notes to the *Félire* for this date, however, as being *in uno die cum Moling* 'in the same day as Moling'. Why should the hagiographer be so misleading? There seems to be little other evidence in the Life which would suggest a close identification between Colmán and Moling Luachra.<sup>49</sup>

A note to May twenty-fourth in the *Félire*,<sup>50</sup> also in the Laud 610 copy, records that the Colmán of that day is *in tres Colmán mór Midhe* 'one of the three [called] Colmán the Great of Meath'. The tradition of three Colmán's of Meath is strongly present throughout *BCh* (§31, 33, 42 etc), but the subject of the twenty-fourth of May feast is not necessarily Colmán of Lann.

The hagiographer apparently suggests a second feast day for the latter Colmán, the first of November (§2). While there is a Colmán mentioned under this date in the Rawlinson B 505 copy of the *Félire*, the accompanying notes clearly allude to a Colmán mac Dimma.<sup>51</sup> The *BCh* reference suggests that this date may actually be the feast of Crónán, another son of Luachán (§2), but this is perhaps the Crónán maccu Cuinn of the *Félire* note.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Meyer, *BCh*, introd. ii.

<sup>49</sup> For a more complete discussion see Chapter 4.2 'Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours'.

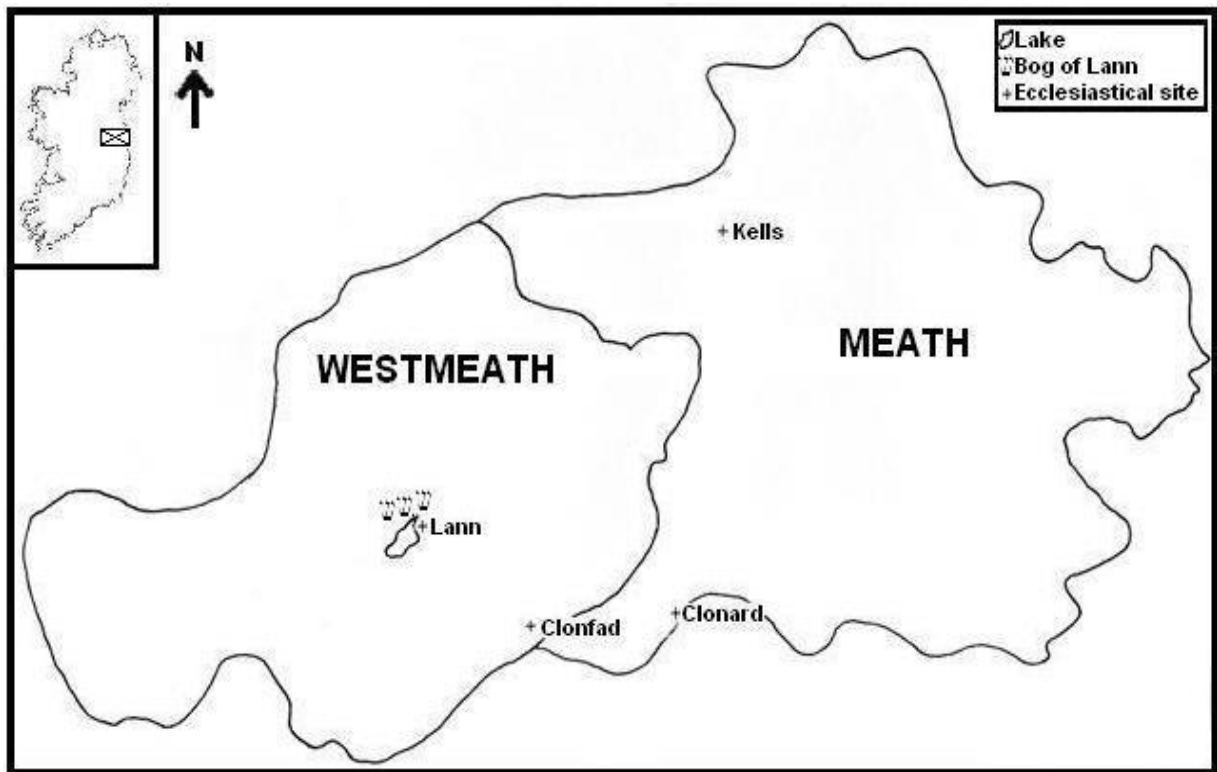
<sup>50</sup> Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, 136, note to May 24<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 238/9, note to November 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* Also in Rawlinson B 505 is a note to March 30<sup>th</sup> which notes Colmán mac Luacháin as a possibility for the Colmán mentioned in the metrical text, which the hagiographer of *BCh* does not mention at all.

### 1.3 The Final Resting Place – Lann meic Luacháin

*Bid hé-sin a ainm co bráth, ar Colmán, .i. Lann meic Lúacháin.* ‘That shall be its name until Doom, said Colmán, that is Lann of the Children of Luachán.’ (§29)



*Map 1: Lann's position in the midlands*

What of Delehaye's notation of the saint's final resting place as a key coordinate?<sup>53</sup> The place from which it was believed the saint would rise on the day of resurrection was an important site, central to the cult, and significant both in secular and ecclesiastical societies. Lann meic Luacháin, the principal church of Colmán, appears as his final resting place according to *BCh* (§96). What else is known of this church, the role of the saint therein, and the role of that church within its community?

<sup>53</sup>Delehaye, *Cinq leçons*, 13-17.

*DIL* ascribes two senses of *lann*: ‘a) land, ground, plot’, and ‘b) house, building, especially a church (cf. Welsh *llann*).<sup>54</sup> The angel Victor shows Colmán a site for his church (§29), saying *Ittá sund, a chléirigh, inad lainde do maccaib Lúacháin* ‘There, Cleric, is a place for a building for the children of Luachán’, to which the saint replies *Bid hé-sin a ainm co bráth, .i. Lann mac Lúacháin* ‘That will be its name until Doom, i.e. The Church of Luachán’s sons’ (§29). We may compare a statement in the Life of Colmán Elo: *bid limsa an baile gan dáil, / Bíd h í an laind si laind Cholmáin* ‘the place will be mine without dispute, this ‘land’ will be the ‘land’ of Colmán’.<sup>55</sup> Three saints called Colmán are associated with *lann* sites.<sup>56</sup> It has been suggested that ‘the association of the name Colmán and Mocholmóc with three of the better documented *lann* sites... maybe more than a coincidence’.<sup>57</sup>

Fr. John Ryan notes of Lann Elo that ‘as *Lann* is a British word for monastery, we should suspect that Colmán came in some way under British influence’.<sup>58</sup> Ryan further notes that ‘Land Abaich (Glenavy, Antrim), Land Mocholmóc and Land Rónáin Find (Magheralin, Co. Down), Leann Beachair (Kilbarrick, Dublin), Land Luacháin (in Meath), Land Léiri and Land Máelduib (in Brega)... are all within reach of the Irish Sea, and may thus have had more intimate contact with Britain.’<sup>59</sup> In an interesting concordance, Flanagan notes that, aside from the examples given above, the other instances of *Lann* as the first element in a church name are situated on the north-eastern coast of Ireland.<sup>60</sup> These coastal settlements may well have had contact with British monasteries. It is less likely in the case of Lann meic Luacháin, Lann Elo and Lann Mocholmóg, though *BCh* mentions a *Baetán Breatnach* ‘Baetán the Briton’ as being one of Colmán’s monks whom he leaves as his ‘substitute’ at the minor church of Drong Faechnig (§79, 80). Lann meic Luacháin was, nevertheless, about sixty miles from either coast.

<sup>54</sup> *DIL* L col. 52 See also Mac Mathúna, ‘Observations on Irish Lann “(Piece of) Land; (Church) Building” and Compounds’, 153-60.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Betha Cholmáin Eala’ in Plummer, *Bethada Naem nÉirenn*, i, 172.

<sup>56</sup> These are Colmán of Lann meic Luacháin, Colmán of Lann Elo and Colmán of Lann Mocholmóg. Lann Elo was situated near modern day Tullamore, Co. Offaly, and is today called Lynally. Lann Mocholmóc is identifiable with Magheralin (*Machaire Laine*), Co. Down.

<sup>57</sup> Flanagan, ‘Ecclesiastical Nomenclature in Irish texts and Place-names, 386-387.

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, *Irish Monasticism. Origins and Early Development*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 129, note 9

<sup>60</sup> Flanagan, ‘Ecclesiastical Nomenclature’, 386-387.

Lann meic Luacháin is the only one of the churches associated with Colmán that is mentioned in historical sources.<sup>61</sup> Episodes of *BCh* (§29, 39, 53) elucidate the foundation of Lann and the extent of its immediate influence. The *fid dorch*a of which there is much mention in the Life is identifiable as an area on the north-eastern shores of Loch Ennel in Co. Westmeath, in which were resident the Uí Dubáin, placed by Walsh in the townland of Glendevine (*Gleann Dubáin*), about two miles east of Lann.<sup>62</sup> According to the Life, the cemetery of the church was sited there previous to the construction of the main church (§29). After the resident Uí Dubáin granted their lands to Colmán, the church of Lann was built (§39, 42). The author carefully notes the extents and boundaries of the land acquired, and its freedom from taxation.

It is perhaps notable that the property is not formally granted at first, but rather it is described as having been assigned to Colmán by divine intervention, the angel Victor appearing to the saint, telling him that deer will carry his books and guide him (§29). Instead of formal documentation of its right to the land, Lann invests its claim over the property with spiritual authority. The angel Victor even gives the site its name, saying that it is a fitting house / place ‘*lann*’ for the sons of Luachán: *Lann meic Luacháin*’ (§29). The associated lands and territories are detailed later. The Uí Dubáin comprise the Uí Dubáin Caille, ‘of the wood’, and the Uí Dubáin Maige, ‘of the plain’ (§39). They grant a number of small areas of land to Colmán, free from taxes. The author’s intimate knowledge of his immediate environs thus provides insight into the likely extent of the possessions of the church of Lann.

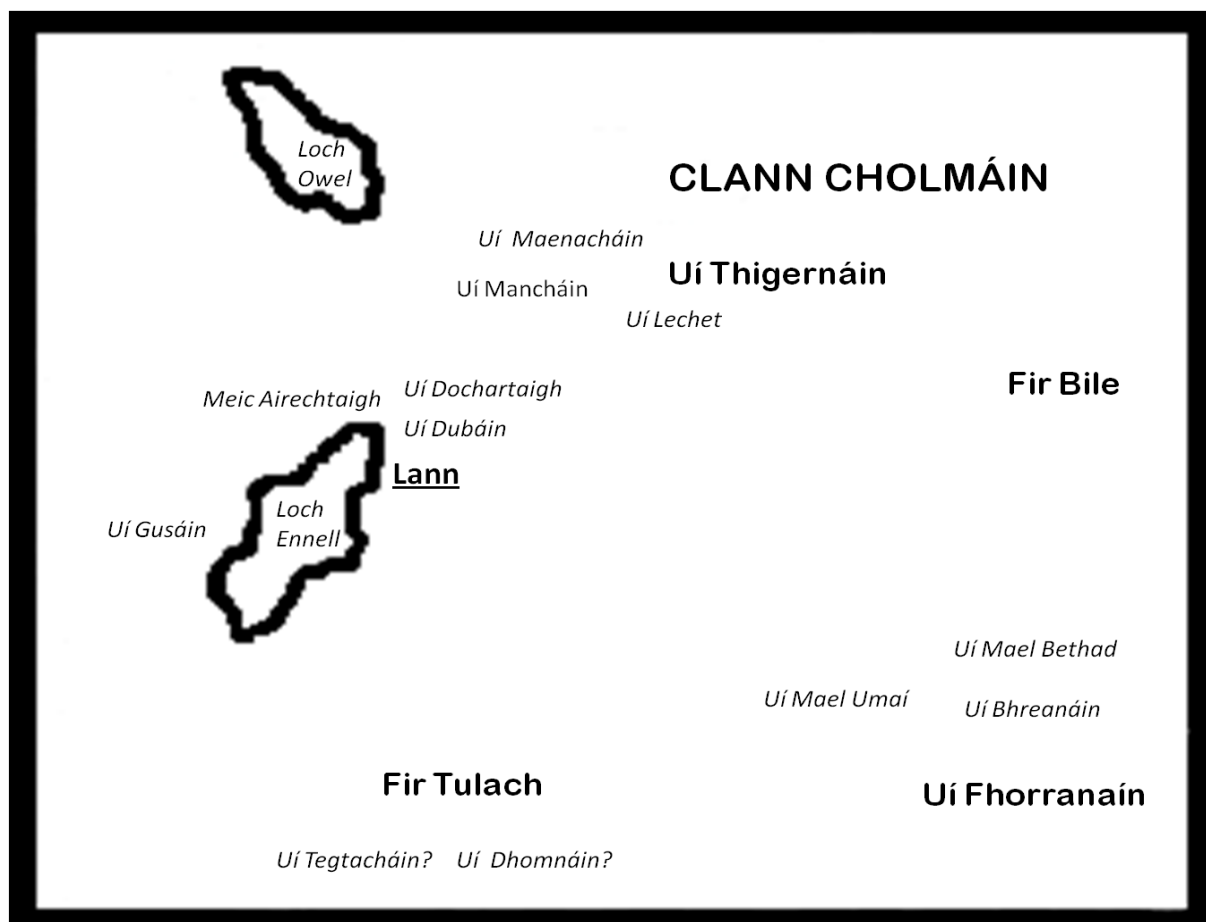
At the feast to celebrate the foundation of the church at Lann, the author describes a gathering of numerous saints, including Fursa, Bishop Etchén and the three Colmán’s of Meath (§39). They make a union in which they guarantee the same rights at the cemetery of Lann as would be had by those buried at their own communities. For example, those buried at Lann would rise on the day of judgement with Colmán, but also with Fursa, as was the right of those buried in his cemeteries. This provides a good opportunity for Lann to attract local rulers who may wish to be buried in a place from which their soul will go to heaven in the most

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<sup>61</sup>AFM 929, 1122; AU 1122; ALCé 1122; MIA 1394.

<sup>62</sup> Walsh, ‘Topography’, 268.

prestigious possible company. There may have been a necessary donation to secure entry, but for those who may not have been able to afford to be interred in the more prestigious centres, such as nearby Clonard or Durrow, the small but seemingly elitist church of Lann might have represented a good option.<sup>63</sup> Notably, the hagiographer mentions that the Uí Fhorranáin kings of the east are buried in the cemetery at Lann, which suggests that Lann played an active and important role in the Uí Fhorranáin community (§45).



*Map 2 & 8: Local family groupings mentioned in BCh*

The annals all agree on the date for the unearthing of the shrine and relics of Colmán in the year 1122.<sup>64</sup> This identifies Lann as the saint's chief church and site of his mortal remains in the twelfth century. Unfortunately, aside from the 1122 mention, attestations in the annals

<sup>63</sup> This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.1 'Relics and Miracles of Colmán and their Function' (*b*) *Relics*.

<sup>64</sup> AFM, AU, ALCé.



regarding Lann are few and far between. For a community which expended such effort in the creation of a lengthy Life of its patron in an attempt to consolidate and increase influence in its wider community, there exists only a sole obit for a head of the community, named Máel Brighde mac Feadacáin who died in 929.<sup>65</sup> Neither the clerics nor the church of Lann is mentioned again in the annals until the fourteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The Miscellaneous Irish Annals, in an entry under 1394, state:

*Land Mic Luachan do losgu le Maircheartach Óg Mag Eochagán  
teamhpall Collman gunnaa minnaib do loscu do 7 scrin Colman Mic  
Luachan do losgudh beos, 7 as mor mor an sgel-sin 7 as mairg la n-  
dearnnadh an gníbh-sin*

“Lann Meic Luacháin was burned by Muirchertach Óg Mac Eochagáin<sup>67</sup> and Colmán’s church with its relics was burned by him, and the shrine of Colmán mac Luacháin was also burned by him; and that is a most grievous event, and woe to him by whom the deed was done”<sup>68</sup>

This information reinforces the link between the saint’s church, relics and shrine. However, large gaps remain in the records between the tenth-century mention of Colmán’s successor, Máel Brigde maic Feadacáin, the unearthing of the relics in the early twelfth century, and the destruction of the site in the fourteenth century. It is possible that Lann remained active as a community up to about the seventeenth century. As will be shown in detail later,<sup>69</sup> an appended note in the Rennes manuscript at the end of the Life<sup>70</sup> informs the reader that the relics of Colmán had been in the community at Lann from the time of Domnall mac Murchada, in the middle of the eighth century, until the Viking incursions, specifically the

<sup>65</sup>AFM s.a. 929. Here Máel Brighde is named as *abb.* *BCh* uses *airchinnech* in the majority cases (§37, 97, 98), but *abad* is attested (§41).

<sup>66</sup> Meyer, *BCh*, introd. i, and Dottin, ‘Notice du Manuscrit Irlandais’, 79-81.

<sup>67</sup> Muirchertach Óg mac Eochagáin was a high ranking member of the Cenél Fiachach, whose leader at the time of the burning of Lann was Máel Sechlainn, most noted for his submission to Henry II, king of England in 1195. See Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland, 1394-5: and submissions of the Irish chiefs*, 117 and 200. Leo Daly also points out that the descendants of Muirchertach are mentioned as a ‘vigorous sept’ in the annals: *The Life of Colmán of Lynn*, introd. xvi. See also AFM s.a. 1445, 1488.

<sup>68</sup> MIA s.a. 1394.

<sup>69</sup> Chapter 2.2 ‘Betha Cholmáin – Paleographical features’.

<sup>70</sup> See Rennes MS 598, fol. 89 recto b. The note is written in the same hand as the majority of *BCh*, presumably by the same scribe.

arrival of Turgéis, or Turgesius, in the middle of the ninth century.<sup>71</sup> Upon arrival of Turgéis they were hidden away, presumably for safety, until after the end of the incursions. The re-emergence of the shrine and relics is placed during the reign of Toirdelbach Ua Conchubair, who was king of Connacht from 1121 – 1156.<sup>72</sup> This information in the Rennes manuscript reflects the data of the annal reference of 1122,<sup>73</sup> though it suggests that the shrine was brought back into use after its concealment, rather than being ‘discovered’. The addition to the Life further informs the reader:

*Iss é immorro ba hairchindech Lainde ann .i. Gilla Críst mac Gilla Pátraic.  
Iss e immorro ba sacart Laindi ann .i. Túathal mac Gilla Cholaim. Iss é  
imorro ba saer ann .i. Gilla Críst Ua Mocháin 7 iss é dorigine scrín im  
taisib cétna FINIT (fol. 89 recto b)*

Moreover, he who was airchinnech of Lann was Giolla Críst mac Giolla Pátraic. Moreover, he who was priest of Lann was Túathal mac Giolla Cholaim. Moreover, he who was goldsmith there was Giolla Críst Ua Mocháin, and it is he who made a [new] shrine around the relics. Finit.”

Thus we have the name of the *airchinnech* at the time, Gilla Críst mac Gilla Pátraic, the priest, Túathal mac Gilla Coluim, and the craftsman, Giolla Críst Ua Mocháin, who made a (presumably new<sup>74</sup>) shrine for the relics. This information is valuable to form a fuller picture of Lann at this juncture in the twelfth century. The mention of the craftsman denotes him as a man of some social standing, and reminds us of the craftsman Anníraid, who features with distinction in the Life (§40, 41). Though archaeological investigations have not produced much of note from the site itself, there certainly have been a number of finds in the immediate area of Lann on the shores of Lough Ennel, which prove that a vibrant metal-

<sup>71</sup> The obits of Domnall Mac Murchada and Turgéis are given respectively s.a. 763 and 845 in AU. For more on Turgéis in Ireland see Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 91-92 and Ó Croinín *Early Medieval Ireland 400 – 1200*, 246-247.

<sup>72</sup> AU. For a history of the kingship of Toirdelbach, and his claims to the High Kingship of Ireland, see Ryan *Toirdelbach Ó Conchubair (1088-1156) King of Connacht, King of Ireland ‘co fresarba’*, 3-22.

<sup>73</sup> See AU, AFM, MIA s.a. 1122, which notes the rediscovery of the shrine of Colmán. AU states *Scrín Cholmain m Luachain d’fhoghbhail i n-ailaidh Lainne ferchubai i talmhain dia Cetain in Braith* ‘The shrine of Colmán son of Luachán was found in the burial place of Lann, a man’s cubit in earth, on Spy Wednesday [22nd March]’.

<sup>74</sup> *BCh* states that the relics of Colmán were kept in a shrine following the saint’s death (§96), which may be supported by the postscript note in the Rennes copy which states that the relics were *ina scrín eter a muindtir ó ré Domnaill meic Murchada* (fol. 89 recto b) ‘in their shrine among the community of Lann from the reign of Domnall mac Murchadh’. AU records the obit of Domnall s.a. 763.

working culture was active in the area around the period between the seventh and the eleventh centuries.<sup>75</sup>

Brief mention of Lann is to be found in ecclesiastical taxation records of the early fourteenth century. We are told that six marks and forty shillings were payable by 'Lynn',<sup>76</sup> and that 'Lynne' paid six marks and eight shillings to the deanery of Mullingar<sup>77</sup> between the years 1302 and 1306. The deanery of Mullingar, in the diocese of Meath, included the 'Union of Moyliscar, Lynn, Carrick, Kilbride Veston, Kilbride Pilate, Enniscoffey and Castlelost'.<sup>78</sup> In this case, Lynn is, of course, Lann meic Luacháin, Carrick is doubtless the Carric mentioned often in the Life (§50, 51). Moyliscar is identified by Hogan as Maol-Eiscir,<sup>79</sup> situated on the eastern side of Lough Ennel within a kilometre of Lann. Kilbride is south-east of this by around ten kilometres, Castlelost is approximately eight kilometres south by south-east of Lann, while Enniscoffey is east of Lough Ennel by about five kilometres. With the exception of the marginally further-afield Kilbride, the three other churches are within an eight kilometre radius of Lann, in the area most detailed by the author in the Life. If we are to give some credence to claims made in the Life over these local areas, it is possible to suggest that these lands share a common heritage and may even have formed the centre of Lann influence around the twelfth century.<sup>80</sup> The parishes of Moyliscar, Lann and Carrick amalgamated late in the seventeenth century.<sup>81</sup>

Some records survive to illuminate a gap of more than two hundred and fifty years between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is a list of the deans at Lann up to its amalgamation with Moyliscar and Carrick.<sup>82</sup> While at first this provides little more than a list of names and years of succession on death, it clearly demonstrates that Lann did continue as

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<sup>75</sup> Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Settlement Systems of Lough Ennel', 55-60.

<sup>76</sup> Sweetman & Handcock, *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland 1302-1307*, 259.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

<sup>78</sup> Healy, *History of the Diocese of Meath* ii, 325 and Mason, *A Statistical Account, or, Parochial Survey of Ireland*, 49.

<sup>79</sup> Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 536.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 5.4, 'Extent of the Influence of Lann', and Map 6, 'Likely Extent of the Influence of Lann in the Twelfth Century'.

<sup>81</sup> Healy, *History of the Diocese of Meath*, 325 and Mason, *A Statistical Account*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Healy, *History of the Diocese of Meath*, 325.

an active, if somewhat damaged church after its late fourteenth-century conflagration. There are minor gaps in the list, but it is nevertheless possible to claim that Lann was an active church from the deanship of Thomas Carpentere, who died in 1400, to that of Edmund Burke, who took office in 1666.

Mention of Lann is made in the sixteenth-century Life of Colum Cille by Maghnas Ó Domnaill. Neither is the reference offhand, but states that Colmán, together with the two other Colmáns of Meath, will act as successor to Colum Cille following his journey to Scotland.<sup>83</sup> This suggests that literary knowledge regarding Colmán mac Luacháin, or at least the three Colmáns, remained in circulation in the early sixteenth century. Such knowledge may have come from earlier sources such as *BCh* or the notes to *Féilire Óengusso*.<sup>84</sup>

### Summary

The reinvention of the saint by the hagiographer is a theme which runs through the Life as a whole, and suggests an ecclesiastical institution seeking to redefine its role in the community. The saint's Life constituted an important medium through which the institution claimed its tributes, and outlined its rights. When secular and ecclesiastical situations changed, as indeed they did greatly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the ancestry and saintly abilities of Lann's patron seem to have been redefined in such a fashion as to strengthen the role of the institution within its community, largely by asserting its claims to wealth and property rights.<sup>85</sup> There may have been an element of influence from the neighbouring Columban communities of Kells and Durrow. The federation of churches of Colum Cille had a very realistic claim to royal heritage. Not only was their patron a Cenél Conaill dynast, but more than a dozen of Colum Cille's *comarbai* 'successors' can be traced in the same influential

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<sup>83</sup> *Fuicfeat-sa triúr name agaib diteónus ar gach n-olc sib acht go creide sib dóib 7 co nderna sib a comairli .i. Colman Ela 7 Colman Lainde mac Luacháin 7 Mocaemhóg Comruire a Midhe*, 'I shall leave you with here holy men who shall protect you against every evil if only you follow heir advice. That is: Colmán Ela and Colmán of Lann meic Luacháin and Mocaemhóg of the coffer in Meath'. The editors note that Mocaemhóg is probably Kevin of Glendalough, and that it is more likely to be read *Mocholmóg Comruire*. See O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, *Betha Colaim Chille*, 212.

<sup>84</sup> Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 136, note to May 24<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3

line of Northern Uí Néill into the middle of the tenth century.<sup>86</sup> The community of Lann is unlikely to have been unaware of the influence of royal family connections on the Columban churches. That Lann should seek to invest its patron with familial links with royal authority is unsurprising.<sup>87</sup>

Based on the foregoing evidence, it seems likely that *BCh*'s hagiographer had access to a version of the *Féilire* now represented in Laud 610, but was not familiar with the version represented in Rawlinson B 505. Regarding familiarity with a copy of the Martyrology of Tallaght, conclusive evidence is absent, as the entries for the month of June are supplied by a later source.

Not much evidence exists with which to create a history of the church at Lann. However, using an interdisciplinary approach it is possible to suggest that Lann was an active church within a closely knit community for the better part of a thousand years. Much evidence is provided in *BCh* regarding the family groups and communities which surrounded Lann, and how it may have interacted with these groups. The offices of the church are also detailed, providing a fuller picture of a small Irish monastic community. This is fully discussed in Chapter 6.3.

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<sup>86</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 78-79, 310-311.

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 5.2 'Lann and the Uí Néill'.

## Chapter 2 – Palaeography and Date

### 2.1 Rennes MS 598 – Overview

*Luid ... for deoradecht asa athardæ féin. ...* ‘He went into exile from his native land...’ (§20)

The sole copy of the Life of Colmán is found in Rennes MS 598, a composite collection dated around the fifteenth century. The text of the Life is located on folio 75 recto *a* to folio 89 recto *a*, as one of a series of gatherings, now bound together, which constitute the Rennes manuscript. Sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century, the manuscript was owned by Breton President Christophe-Paul de Robien (1698-1756), and following the Revolution was transferred, along with the remainder of his library, to the Bibliothèque Municipale in Rennes. It remained there until its transfer, along with other early materials, to the Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole in 2001. How the manuscript was acquired by, or for, President de Robien remains unknown.<sup>88</sup> However, all indications suggest that it was compiled in Ireland. Preliminary studies of this manuscript confused it with another Irish-language manuscript donated to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>89</sup> While the Benedictines of the congregation of Saint Maur gave a brief view of the script of the Rennes manuscript,<sup>90</sup> their scant knowledge of Irish palaeography misled them into believing the manuscript to be of far greater antiquity than is the case. The composition or collation of the manuscript had been ascribed by the Benedictines to the eleventh or twelfth century. It was not until some thirty years later that a number of issues regarding both date and identity were addressed by James Todd.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Information was supplied to me in correspondence with Mme Sarah Toulouse, chief archivist at the Bibliothèque de Rennes Metropole. Mme Toulouse was unable to provide a closer timeframe for the compilation of the manuscript, but suggests that the binding is Irish. This issue could be clarified further if a scholar of Irish manuscript binding were to make a study of the manuscript. I am also indebted to Mme Marie Charlotte Tanguy for her kind assistance in providing me with digital images of the manuscript, and to Ms. Marie-Luise Theuerkauf of UCC for her help in translating the correspondence to and from France.

<sup>89</sup> Todd ‘On an Irish Manuscript at the National Library in Paris’, 223-228.

<sup>90</sup> Tassin and Toustain, *Nouveau Traité de Diplomatie* iii, 200-201, 228-229. A further account of the manuscript is to be found in another Benedictine work, de Vaines, *Dictionnaire Raisonné de Diplomatie* i, 456.

<sup>91</sup> Todd, *Some Account of the Irish Manuscript Deposited by President De Robien in the Public Library of Rennes*. In his revision, Todd points out that the confusion may have arisen due to a note inserted at the

Todd re-evaluates the date of the manuscript based on the grounds of its palaeography and of its content. He notes that the manuscript contractions do not provide accurate dating criteria, as thought by the Benedictines. Of Dom Tassin and Dom Toustain's mention of content, Todd notes that, as Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure are both quoted, the manuscript can not have been compiled prior to the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>92</sup> He concludes that the character of the writing 'indicates unmistakably the end of the fifteenth century as the period at which the MS was written', and also notes that it was the product of more than one scribe.<sup>93</sup> Below is a table based on the division of the manuscript by Todd, which seeks to outline its contents.

*Fig. 4 – Contents of Rennes MS 598*

Section	Starting Point	Description of Content
1	<i>fol. 22 verso a</i>	Some short religious tracts
2	<i>fol. 23 recto a</i>	Tract on Saint Augustine, probably translated from Latin
3	<i>fol. 25 recto a</i>	Sermon by Saint Bernard and similar religious treatises, probably again translated from Latin
4	<i>fol. 35 recto b</i>	Treatise on the rules of Confession of Saint Thomas Aquinas
5	<i>fol. 45 recto a</i>	A collection of sayings from the works of Saint Augustine

beginning of the volume outlining its contents, written in English around the middle of the seventeenth century. Of the author of this note, Todd mentions that "[he was] a person who was very imperfectly acquainted with the Irish language, and wholly ignorant of its palaeography. He attributes to the MS a much higher antiquity than it really possesses, and his opinion has evidently been the cause of the mistakes made by later writers on the subject", 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

6	<i>fol. 47 recto b</i>	A series of short tracts on mercy, in which are quoted Saints Augustine, Gregory, Isidore, Ambrose and Bonaventure
7	<i>fol. 52 recto b</i>	An introduction to the Travels of John Mandeville, followed by an Irish translation of this work
8	<i>fol. 69 recto a</i>	A religious tract
9	<i>fol. 74 verso</i>	Originally blank, now contains a note from 1599
10	<i>fol. 75 recto a</i>	The Life of Colmán mac Luacháin
11	<i>fol. 90 recto</i>	A copy of the <i>Dindshenchus</i>

Of particular interest to Todd was the introductory passage to the Travels of Sir John Mandeville,<sup>94</sup> stating that the book was ‘put into Irish’ by Fingin Úa Mathgamhna in 1472. Todd notes that the earliest printed version of the book was in Italian in 1480, followed by an English edition from Westminster in 1499. Thus, the Irish version would predate any printed version of the text.<sup>95</sup> Of further interest was the provision of a geographical location for the translation of this text, which is clearly stated to have occurred at Rossbrin, in the Parish of Schull, County Cork.<sup>96</sup> This Munster element is again emphasised in the section of the manuscript following the Travels of Mandeville, which contains a list of the most prominent

<sup>94</sup> Todd, *Some Account*, 14, notes that this is an account of a British Knight who travelled to the Holy Land on Michaelmas Day in 1332, and had a book of the account of his travels confirmed by the Pope when he returned some thirty-four years later. More recent scholarship generally ascribes the date of composition to c. 1357, some thirty-five years following the supposed completion of the travels, begun in 1322, not 1332, as mentioned in the Rennes introduction to the travels (*fol. 52 recto b*). On Mandeville, see Seymour, ‘Sir John Mandeville’, 9-11.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 15. On the dates of the Italian and English printed works see *Short-title catalogue of books printed in Italy and of Italian books printed in other countries from 1465 to 1600 now in the British Library*, 408 and Seymour. ‘Sir John Mandeville’, 50 and 55.

<sup>96</sup> Todd, *Some Account*, 13.



‘chieftains’ in the country in the year 1472, when the translation was being carried out. This list places a particular emphasis on the southern part of Ireland, though the whole country is covered.

Following Todd’s account of the manuscript is Georges Dottin’s study of 1894, largely an abbreviated version of the work of Todd.<sup>97</sup> An additional linguistic note was added to that of Dottin by Douglas Hyde in 1894, published a year later.<sup>98</sup> In 1894 and 1895, Whitley Stokes published the manuscript’s *dindshenchus* ‘placename lore’, of which he had received photographs from L. Collet.<sup>99</sup> However, this period of attention to the manuscript did not result in the publication of what Todd considered its two most important texts, a version of the travels of Sir John Mandeville to the Holy Land (*fol. 52 recto b*) and the Irish Life of Colmáin mac Luacháin (*BCh*) (*fol. 75 recto a*).

The edition of the text of *BCh* was published by Kuno Meyer in 1911, on the basis of photographs of the manuscript bequeathed to him upon the death of Whitley Stokes.<sup>100</sup> In his introduction, Meyer dates the manuscript copy of the Life to the end of the fourteenth, or beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>101</sup> He agreed with Todd’s assertions that the manuscript was the product of a number of different scribes, comprising an overall total of one hundred and thirty two folios.<sup>102</sup>

If we assume that the Travels of Sir John Mandeville was translated in 1472, and that the *dindshenchus* is, according to Todd, attributable to the late thirteenth, or beginning of the fourteenth, century, then we may assume that the different sections of the manuscript were not brought together until some time in the late fifteenth century at the very earliest. This is

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<sup>97</sup> Dottin ‘Notice du Manuscrit Irlandais de la Bibliothèque de Rennes’, 79-148, especially at 79-91.

<sup>98</sup> Hyde, ‘Deux Notes du MSS Irlandais de Rennes’, 420.

<sup>99</sup> Stokes, ‘The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchus’, 272-336, 418-484; ‘The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchus, published with translation and notes’, 31-83, 135-167, 269-312.

<sup>100</sup> *BCh*, introd. i, note 4.

<sup>101</sup> Todd noted that the MS could not have been compiled before about a century or so earlier than the date proposed by Meyer. Todd, *Some Account*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *BCh*, introd. i.

supported by Stokes' more recent work on the *dindshenchus*, in which he notes that the text was probably copied in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, but may have originally been compiled in the eleventh or twelfth.<sup>103</sup> As regards *BCh*, evidence is not in abundance, but, given Meyer's proposed date of the manuscript copy, an annal reference to the burning of the church and shrine of Colmán in 1394 may suggest a context.<sup>104</sup> We may suppose that the saint's Life, having survived the fire, might have been copied to ensure future safe-keeping. An extra note in Rennes 598 explicitly indicates that at least sections of what is now a composite manuscript were still in Ireland in 1599 (fol. 74 b):

*Ambitosus honnos, luxus, turpisque voloptas. Haec tria pro trino Numine mundus habet.*<sup>105</sup>

*Mise Edmund óg o Ceallaigh do scriobh an rand laidni sia in Baile-Puirt-an-Rideri .i. ansa Gleand, an seisedh la do mi August, 1599; an ced bliadain do cogadh Muimnech a naigaidi gall* (fol. 74 b)

'Vain (public) honour, and wealth, and disgraceful desire, the world considers these three things as a triple power'.<sup>106</sup>

'I am Edmund Óg Ó Ceallaigh who wrote this Latin verse in Baile Puirt an Rideri,<sup>107</sup> i.e. in Gleann, the sixth day of the month of August, 1599; the first year of the war of the Munstermen against the Foreigners'.<sup>108</sup>

*BCh*, a decidedly midlands-focused work, was included in a manuscript of largely Munster connection (see *ff* 52 *recto b* and 74 *verso*). This seems puzzling; however some evidence remains that must be taken into account. It may be of note here that the Miscellaneous Irish Annals, which contain the sole account of the 1394 conflagration at Lann, do themselves

<sup>103</sup> See Stokes 'The Prose Tales of the Rennes Dindshenchas', 272

<sup>104</sup> MIA s.a. 1394.

<sup>105</sup> This appears to be a variation of a common phrase which many Englishmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had above their doorways. A form appears in a letter of complaint to King James in 1617-8. Here it reads *ambitosus honos, opes turpisque voluptas. Haec tria pro trina numine mundus habet*. See Joyce, 'Over Compton: Bill of Complaint in Abingdon v. Beaton et al.', 236. I am grateful to Dr Nienke Tjoelker of UCC Classics department for this information.

<sup>106</sup> Translation kindly suggested by Dr Nienke Tjoelker.

<sup>107</sup> *Baile Puirt an Rideri* is identifiable today as Glin, Co. Limerick. See Ó Ríain, Ó Murchadha and Murray, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames* fasc. 2, 53.

<sup>108</sup> See AFM s.a. 1599, 1600.

have strong Munster connections, especially what Ó hInnse terms Fragment I.<sup>109</sup> It is of further note that this section of MIA seems to have had a connection with Cork, in which Colmán is described as spending much time with Mochuta at Lismore and indeed founding his own church at Cell Uird (see Chapter 4.1.3.).<sup>110</sup> Fingin Úa Mathgamhna, mentioned previously as having been the translator, into Irish, of the Travels of John Mandeville, also seems to have close connection to at least the first fragment of MIA.<sup>111</sup> While this information is tantalising, it must be noted that Fragment III, which contains the 1394 entry, seems clearly to have been written by Aughustín Magraidhin, of the monastic community of Lough Ree, some 25-30 miles from Lann.<sup>112</sup> It would be no surprise that the attack on Lann and destruction of both the church and its relics would have been recorded by a monastic community in such relative proximity. Many tempting items of information though there may be, no conclusive evidence serves to explain why a *BCh* should feature in a Manuscript of largely Munster provenance.

A final suggestion is that the prominence of religious content may provide a reason for the inclusion of a saint's Life among the collected texts. If Mdme. Toulouse, of Bibliothèque de Rennes Metropole, is correct in her assumption that the binding of the manuscript is Irish in origin, it seems likely it existed as one volume by the time of President de Robien's death in 1756. The manuscript was in the collection that passed, upon his death, to the public library at Rennes, of which he was founder. The 1599 note (fol. 74 verso), added to a section which appears to feature older material, indicates that the manuscript was at least partly assembled by this date. However, unless further evidence comes to light, it is impossible to say when the manuscript was compiled in its current state and what led to its acquisition in France by de Robien.

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<sup>109</sup> Ó hInnse, *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* (A.D. 1114-1437), viii-xiii

<sup>110</sup> One enticing possibility, suggested to me by Professor Máire Herbert, is that a copy of the Life survived in Cell Uird, today Kilworth, in County Cork. Cell Uird is claimed as a church founded by Colmán (§25), and seems to have been in the *paruchia* of Lismore in the fifteenth century, apparently the timeframe for the copying of the Life. Lismore, associated with Saint Mochuta, is mentioned in *BCh* as being visited by Colmán, who is also described as having a close relationship with the Lismore and Rahan saint (§20-4). Can this relationship have remained a tradition in Cell Uird, leading to the acquisition of a copy of *BCh*, which was later bound together with other Munster material? Unless further evidence comes to light, such a possibility must remain as speculation.

<sup>111</sup> Ó hInnse, *MIA*, ix-x

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* xiv-xv

## 2.2 Betha Cholmáin – Palaeographical features.<sup>113</sup>

*Iss ed immurgu indisitt na scríbenda díada...* ‘This, moreover, is what the divine writings say...’ (§106)

As we have seen, the folios containing *BCh* were bound up in the Rennes manuscript with other material.<sup>114</sup> It seems likely that the inclusion of *BCh* in the collection is the reason for its current survival. No other copy of the text has come to light. Meyer describes the text of the Life as

‘a vellum quarto written in a fine bold hand of perhaps the fourteenth or fifteenth century ... (and) occupies fifteen folios now numbered 75-89. The pages are divided into two columns of thirty-eight lines each. There are no marginal notes to show when and where this copy was made. The Life itself ends at the bottom of *fol.89 recto a* with a large FINIT’.<sup>115</sup>

Meyer further relates that, following this FINIT, a note by the same scribe records further information about the history of the church and community of Lann meic Luacháin from the eighth to the twelfth century. It provides valuable information concerning the relics of the saint, as well as important members of the local ecclesiastical community at Lann during this period:

*Robátar tra taissi Colmáin meic Lúacháin ina scrín eter a muindtir ó ré Domnaill meic Murchada meic Airmedaig meic Conaill Guthbind co táinig Turgés 7 Gaill glassa a nÉrinn. Rofolged tra doidissi ríasna gentib útt ó ré an Turgés sin co flaith Toirdelbaig meic Rúaidrí úi Conchubair for Érinn. Murchad immorro uí Máel Sechlainn, iss é ba rí Midi an tan túargabad a talmáin an scrín cétna. Iss é immorro ba hairchindech Lainde ann .i. Gilla Críst mac Gilla Pátraic. Iss e immorro ba sacart Laindi ann .i. Túathal mac Gilla Cholaim. Iss é immorro ba saer ann .i. Gilla Críst Úa Mocháin 7 iss é dorigine scrín im taisib cétna FINIT (fol. 89recto b)*

<sup>113</sup> I am very grateful to Mme Marie-Charlotte Tanguy of the Bibliothèque de Rennes Metropole for providing me with images of the copy of *BCh* held in Rennes. Her assistance has been invaluable for clarifying matters of length marks etc, but I am also grateful for the opportunity which presented itself to see images of what is a beautifully preserved text.

<sup>114</sup> *BCh*, introd. i.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

‘Now the relics of Colmán mac Luacháin were in their shrine among his community from the reign of Domnall m. Murchadh m. Airmedach m. Conall Guthbinn<sup>116</sup> until Turgéis<sup>117</sup> and the Foreigners came to Ireland. However, from the time of that Turgéis to the reign of Toirdelbach m. Rúadhrí Úa Conchubair over Ireland<sup>118</sup> it was hidden again from those gentiles. Now Murchad Úa Máele Sechnaill<sup>119</sup> was king of Mide when the same shrine was lifted out of the earth. Moreover, he who was airchinnech of Lann was Giolla Críst mac Giolla Pátraic. Moreover, he who was priest of Lann was Túathal mac Giolla Cholaim. Moreover, he who was goldsmith there was Giolla Críst Úa Mocháin, and it is he who made a [new] shrine around the relics. Finit.’

An entry in the Annals of Ulster states that Colmán’s relics were brought out of the earth on Spy Wednesday, i.e. March the twenty-second, in 1122.<sup>120</sup> It seems very plausible that this reintroduction of the relics into the community at Lann in 1122 led directly not only to the production of a new shrine, but perhaps also to the composition of a Life. Linguistic analysis coupled with internal evidence will suggest that such a timeframe for the Life’s composition is appropriate.<sup>121</sup> The use of locative phrases, such as *sund* (§26) and *i fus* (§74) when referring to Colmán’s time spent at Lann, and land granted to him in the area respectively, indicate that it is likely that the Life was probably composed at Lann itself.

The copy of *BCh* currently at Rennes features few glosses and is remarkably clear in its presentation, suggesting that the exemplar from which the scribe was copying was very clear also. In his edition of the Rennes copy, Meyer notes that there are two distinct hands utilised. The first of these, which I shall call X, begins the Life and finishes it. The second hand, Y, first appears in two glosses to the main text at fol. 76 verso b, enters the main text around half

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<sup>116</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 763.

<sup>117</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 845.

<sup>118</sup> See AU s.a. 1121-1156.

<sup>119</sup> AU s.a. 1118 and 1123.

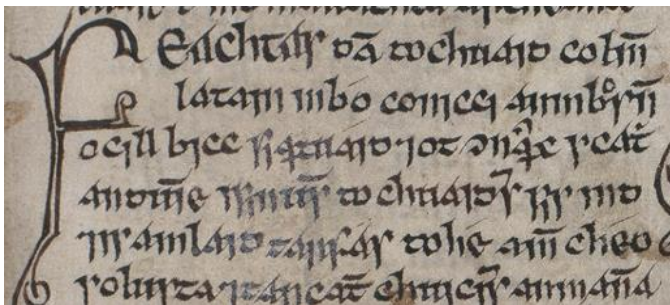
<sup>120</sup> AU s.a. 1122.

<sup>121</sup> See Chapter 2.4 ‘The Date of Betha Cholmáin – Linguistic Evidence’

way down that column and continues to the end of the folio. Hand X then begins again. Hand Y re-enters the text towards the end of fol. 78 verso b, continuing until the end of fol. 79 recto b. Hand X resumes at the beginning of fol. 79 verso a, and continues until the end of the Life, as shown in Fig. 5 below.

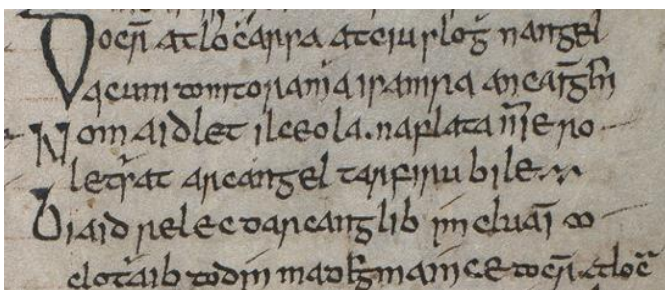
*Fig. 5 – Scribal Change*

Scribe	X		Y	X		Y	X	
			+ gloss					
MS folio	75 ra - 76 vb		76 v b	77 ra - 78 vb		78 vb - 79 rb	78 vb	- end



*Fig 5 (a) – Scribe X*

*Detail from folio 77 recto a*



*Fig 5 (b) – Scribe Y*

*Detail from folio 79 recto b*

Meyer notes that hand Y is inferior to X, but otherwise makes no comments about the role of each of the scribes in the overall composition of the Life. The reason for this is most likely that neither the content nor style of the sections written by hand Y differs notably from that of hand X. The language remains largely identical, and there seems to be no discernible reason, based on content, for the change of scribes. The poem beginning *Mo mac, inman hé* ‘My son, beloved is he’ (ff 76 v b - 77 r a) includes a change from hand X to hand Y, and displays no

change in either the language or metrical scheme.<sup>122</sup> It is therefore likely that both scribe X and scribe Y had been trained at the same location, in the same style, possibly at Lann itself.

It is interesting that no mention has been made, as far as I am aware, of the fact that, while the text of the *BCh* is complete, the scribal plan appears to have been left unfinished. The Rennes copy shows that the decoration of capital letters, usually found at the beginning of a new episode, remains sporadic. The Life begins on fol. 75 verso, with its upper case letters fully completed, and this is the case until fol. 80 verso b, where there is a notable absence of an upper case ‘A’ at the beginning of §40. The capital ‘A’ of *Araile* is again omitted on fol. 80 recto a, at the beginning of the next episode, §41. This same column includes a full upper case ‘D’ of *Dorónad* at the beginning of the next episode, §42. The next letter omitted is once more an ‘A’ of *Araile* at fol. 81 verso a, beginning §44. A pattern is established for the remainder of the Life as regards the upper case letters at the opening of episodes, those examples specifically involving the capital ‘A’ remaining unfinished together with a sole example of an upper case ‘B’ at the beginning of *Bendachais*, §50, and the numeral ‘iii’ towards the end of §49.<sup>123</sup>

Where examples exist, the letter ‘A’ in the manuscript occurs in two formats. A rounded, stylised ‘A’ is found in three places in the Life: in *Araile* at §19, 27, and 28. Elsewhere, the ‘A’ presents a large descending stroke on the left, and a very low cross-stroke,<sup>124</sup> e.g. at §15, 16 and 17. It is very similar to the scribe’s upper-case ‘F’ e.g. at §13, 103. It is to be noted that there is a switch to the second type of ‘A’ after a number of chapters, but the work of adding these capitals soon ceases and remains incomplete. It is a possibility that two separate decorators were working on the manuscript, each favouring a different method of rendering

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<sup>122</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3, and 3.4 ‘The verse in *BCh*’.

<sup>123</sup> However, there are other examples of fully complete capitals throughout the Life, especially towards the end, e.g. ‘B’ in *Báettán*, §80 and in *Ba*, §100 ; ‘I’ in *Íar*, § 98; ‘T’ in *Táinigc*, § 91 and § 96; ‘F’ in *Follus*, §103.

<sup>124</sup> While generally uncommon, examples of this style of capital ‘A’ are to be found in *Leabhar Úa Maine*, e.g. at fol. 41 verso b and fol. 48 recto a. An example of capital ‘F’, similar to the capital ‘A’, is to be found at fol. 16 recto a. Timothy O’Neill has noted that these were written by Fáelán Mac a’Ghabhann (†1423), and most likely before 1394. Given the AU annal reference for the burning of Lann in the same year, it is possible to suggest that *Leabhar Úa Maine* and the Rennes copy of *BCh* were written within a relatively close time period. See O’Neill, *The Irish Hand*, 77. Cf. also an example of a similar capital ‘A’ in the fifteenth-century Trinity MS 1336, col. 55.

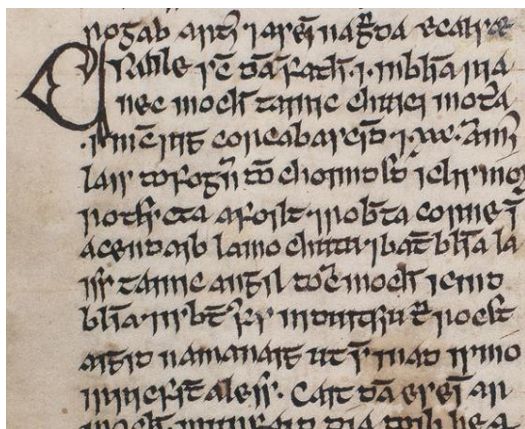
‘A’. It is notable that there is no variation in the other upper-case letters of the Life. If ‘A’ were the final capital to be added, then it is possible that one decorator had finished most of the manuscript, and begun the letter ‘A’, before another took over briefly. For examples, see the following table.

*Fig. 6 – The Capital ‘A’*



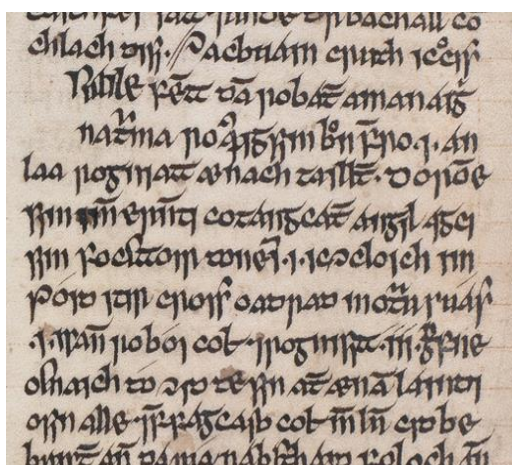
*Fig. 6 (a) - Capital ‘A’ type 1*

*Detail from folio 77 recto b*



*Fig. 6 (b) - Capital ‘A’ type 2*

*Detail from folio 78 verso a*



*Fig. 6 (c) - Missing Capital ‘A’*

*Detail from folio 86 verso b*



Regarding the interruption to the final completion of the text, we have noted an annal entry for 1394<sup>125</sup> describing the burning of the church at Lann and the shrine of Colmán, along with his relics, by Muirchertach Óg Mac Eochagáin, a man of high standing in Cenél Fiachach.<sup>126</sup> While it is impossible to assert that an event like this led to the interruption of the manuscript's completion, the information does provide insight into the political situation at the time. It is likely that there were other transgressions against the church at Lann for which we lack records. The uncertainty caused by such events may have impelled copying of the original twelfth-century exemplar by the community at Lann. Similar threats may have led to the abandonment of the manuscript's decoration at a stage close to completion. No evidence remains to elucidate further the incomplete state of the manuscript copy of *BCh*. The original Life has been lost to us through some unfortunate occurrence of man or nature, but we are lucky that this single copy survives.

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<sup>125</sup> MIA.

<sup>126</sup> MIA. For further discussion on Muirchertach Óg Mac Eochagáin, see Chapter 1.3, 'The Final Resting Place – Lann meic Luacháin'.

## 2.3 The Date of *Betha Cholmáin* – Internal Evidence

*ben Conchubair húi Mælsechlainn, co ruc an rí ar éicin hí ⁊ an rígan ó rí  
Fer Tulach...* ‘the wife of Conchubar Úa Máel Sechlainn, whom the king  
carried off by force, along with the wife of the king of Fir Thulach...’ (§50)

The internal evidence of *BCh* provides a *terminus post quem* for the composition of the text around the middle, or latter part of the eleventh century.

### a) Evidence suggesting a date of at least the eighth century

*BCh* contains evidence regarding the ecclesiastical position of churches in the midlands region. Colmán is depicted as travelling to Mochuta at Rahan to study with him (§18). Later, the author describes the expulsion from Rahan, and subsequent settling of Mochuta and his retinue at Lismore, in Co. Waterford (§20). While the expulsion and revitalisation of Lismore by Mochuta and his community are attested in the annals as occurring in the seventh century,<sup>127</sup> other details are likely to be later. *BCh* relates that Colmán, in the course of his southern stay, founded the church of Cell Uird, today Kilworth, Co. Cork, near Fermoy (§19). Some effort is expended on providing the details of this. The hagiographer notes the following:

*Óta in ibraig conici in croiss ⁊ in srait[h] fil frisin crois indnís ⁊ Erechtach  
.i. erchindech Lainne ⁊ Úa hÁengusa erchinnech Cilli Uird icca críchad ⁊  
sech[t] traigid fichit indti*

‘from the yew wood as far as the cross and the road which is below the cross: and Airechtach, the *airchinnech* of Lann, and Úa hOengusa, *airchinnech* of Cell Uird, measured it out, and there are twenty-seven feet in it’.

A record of the exact dimensions of the church land, some twenty-seven feet, granted to Colmán by Dúngal, son of the king of Fermoy (§24) is curious. Moreover, the mention of the

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<sup>127</sup> AU s.a. 635, AFM s.a. 631.

*airchinnech* of both Lann and of Cell Uird must place the episode a remove from a seventh-century setting.<sup>128</sup> The role of the successors to the saint in this episode is akin to that of ecclesiastics in eleventh- and twelfth-century monastic charter material, such as is found in the Book of Kells.<sup>129</sup> While such material may represent a continuation of an earlier tradition,<sup>130</sup> it is unlikely that the present statement derives from an era before the eleventh century. It is more likely that the charter material formulae in property transactions recorded here, and elsewhere in *BCh* (§39, 73, 74) are following a trend apparent in eleventh- and twelfth-century records.<sup>131</sup>

The role occupied by Clonmacnoise in the Life is also indicative of a date later than the seventh century. The institution is represented by its patron, Ciarán, who visits Lann to request acknowledgment of his superiority over Colmán (§85). Colmán refuses, and also refuses a union between the two churches, stating that he will accept only Mochuta as his superior. From this it would seem that Lann was choosing to ally with Rahan, rather than Clonmacnoise.<sup>132</sup> An attempt by Ciarán's church to assert its authority over Lann, perhaps attempting to absorb its property and wealth, is a likely scenario. Clonmacnoise had sought domination over other, less influential, churches a number of times from around the ninth century.<sup>133</sup> Its claims to power were largely based on a close relationship with the Úa Máel Sechnaill dynasty between the ninth and the eleventh centuries.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, that Clonmacnoise is presented as seeking dominance over Lann, to its east, may represent changing diocesan structures following the Ráth Breasail church synod of 1111.<sup>135</sup> The Life

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<sup>128</sup> See Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 – 1000*, 102 and Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 223.

<sup>129</sup> Herbert, 'Charter Material from Kells', 61-62.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> For a more full discussion on the property transactions in *BCh* see Chapter 5, 'Secular Concerns of *BCh*'.

<sup>132</sup> For further discussion of this, see Chapter 4.2, 'Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours'.

<sup>133</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 241.

<sup>134</sup> A prayer for Flann Sinna (†916), son of Maél Sechnaill I, is inscribed onto the bottom of the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise. Tempull Maél Sechnaill is also named after the dynasty, see Manning, *Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly*, 32, 42. Conchubar Úa Maél Sechnaill (†1073) was also buried at Clonmacnoise. See Walsh 'The Úa Maélsechlainn Kings of Meath', 171.

<sup>135</sup> See AU, AFM, CS, ATig s.a. 1111 and Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, 182-183. Far more detail about this, and other, Synods of the twelfth century is given at the beginning of section two of the current work.

articulates commentary from the church of Lann on its demanding neighbour, ensuring that there is no doubt that it rejected its overtures.<sup>136</sup>

The relationship between Lann and Rahan depicted in the Life is also indicative of a date later than the seventh century. Mention is made of Fidmuine Úa Súanaig (§42, 75), named as *anchorite* ‘anchorite’ of Rahan in his obit in the year 757.<sup>137</sup> Another of the family, Fidairle, is referred to as *abb* ‘abbot’ of Rahan, in his obit, recorded a year later.<sup>138</sup> The Uí Shúanaigh therefore came to prominence in Rahan in the eighth century, about a century after the expulsion of Mochuta. Fr. Power notes that Mochuta’s foundation of Rahan was forgotten, as abbots began styling themselves as *comarba* of the Uí Shúanaigh, and not of Mochuta.<sup>139</sup> It is clear that the author of *BCh* is well aware of Mochuta’s original connection with Rahan, but the mention of the Uí Shúanaigh in the Life demonstrates that it cannot have been composed before the middle of the eighth century.

*b) Evidence suggesting a date of at least the eleventh century, but not later than the twelfth century*

By the time of the synod of Cashel in 1101,<sup>140</sup> the political landscape of Ireland had changed greatly. The once powerful Clann Cholmáin, represented by the Úa Máel Sechnaill family, were still kings of Mide, yet their power had diminished greatly, largely due to the inability of their rulers to capitalise on the achievements of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill,<sup>141</sup> and the rise in influence of Brian Boruma in Munster.<sup>142</sup> Máel Sechnaill had extended his kingdom from the river Shannon to the Irish Sea, having defeated his rivals, the Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega.<sup>143</sup> His descendants were the most influential royal grouping in the midlands and,

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<sup>136</sup> Clonmacnoise had expanded its influence during the eighth century by attacking other monastic churches, notably Birr in 760 (AU) and the Columban church of Durrow four years later. It has been noted that Tírechán had used the verb *for-cuirethar* ‘rape’ when denouncing these expansionist tendencies, see Byrne, ‘Church and Politics, c. 750 – c. 1100’, 660.

<sup>137</sup> AU s.a. 757, AFM s.a. 750.

<sup>138</sup> AFM s.a. 758.

<sup>139</sup> Power, *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuta*, 190, note to §74.

<sup>140</sup> AFM.

<sup>141</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 1022.

<sup>142</sup> Byrne, ‘Ireland before the battle of Clontarf’, 860.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

though their influence and prestige had greatly diminished, they continued to be the most influential kings at the beginning of the twelfth century. Lann, situated in the centre of Co. Westmeath, was right in the middle of lands presided over by the *Úa Máel Sechnaill* rulers. Their presence makes itself known in the *Life*, as Lann is shown as vying for the attention of the ruling dynasty which was associated with major ecclesiastical centres such as Clonmacnoise<sup>144</sup> and the Columban churches.<sup>145</sup>

For the most part, the hagiographer of *BCh* is careful to ensure as much consistency as possible with the putative seventh-century setting of his composition whenciting figures descended from Colmán Mór, eponymous ancestor to the *Clann Cholmáin*.<sup>146</sup> At times, however, he weaves into his text individuals who lived later than the seventh century. In one episode, the King of Mide is referred to as Máel Sechlainn (§41). It is difficult to be certain whether the figure being referred to is Máel Sechnaill I, who died in 862,<sup>147</sup> or his namesake, who died in 1022.<sup>148</sup> Either way, it seems to suggest that the *Life*, as it survives in the Rennes manuscript, cannot have been composed before the middle of the ninth century. Further detail in the text makes it more likely that the Máel Sechnaillin question is the second of that name. In this connection, it is particularly notable that the grandson of Máel Sechnaill, Conchubar,<sup>149</sup> is introduced to the *Life* (§50).

Specific references to Cró-Inis, today Crowinis or Cormorant Island on Lough Ennell, as residence of the kings of Mide (§62, 101) reinforce a proposed date of composition of the tenth century or later. This crannóg fortress became one of the key strongholds of *Clann Cholmáin* in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It served in conjunction with their main fortress and royal seat at Dún na Scíath, itself situated near the same lake, following the move from

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<sup>144</sup> A prayer for Flann Sinna (916), son of Maél Sechnaill I, is inscribed onto the bottom of the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise. Tempull Maél Sechnaill is also named after the dynasty. See Manning, *Clonmacnoise*, 32 and 42. Conchubar *Úa Maéle Sechnaill* (1073) was also buried at Clonmacnoise. See Walsh, 'The *Ua Maélechlainn* kings of Meath', 171.

<sup>145</sup> Murchad *Úa Maél Sechnaill* had a house, and died, at Durrow. See AU s.a. 1153.

<sup>146</sup> The role of *Clann Cholmáin*, its individual kings and how they are presented in *BCh* is more fully discussed in Chapter 5.2, 'Lann and the *Uí Néill*'.

<sup>147</sup> AU.

<sup>148</sup> AU.

<sup>149</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 1073.

the fortress at Uisneach sometime around the eighth or ninth century.<sup>150</sup> In *BCh* (§62), we are informed of the entitlements of the King of Mide from the surrounding petty kingdoms. It has been suggested that Rushy Island and School Boy Island,<sup>151</sup> situated near to Lann, were defensive sites of the Fir Thulach kings over which their Chlann Cholmáin over-lords may have made some claim during times of conflict.<sup>152</sup> Being concerned with its secular neighbours, the monastic settlement at Lann, via the Life of its patron, sets down the limits of troops and provisions that the king of Mide is allowed to demand from the local rulers of Uí Fhorranáin, Uí Thigernáin and Fir Thulach.

While Paul Walsh maintains that the mention of Cró-Inis in the Life indicates that it was a location for the kings of Meath since the seventh century,<sup>153</sup> consideration of the Life and its political aims prove this to be unlikely, as does the lack of other evidence placing the Clann Cholmáin in this locality in the seventh century. Available evidence indicates that Clann Cholmáin moved their base of operations from Uisneach to Dún na Scíath and Cró-Inis sometime during the eighth or ninth century, the latter being more likely.<sup>154</sup> The Cró-Inis stronghold underwent large refortification work and expansion in the first quarter of the twelfth century, of which a plank palisade may be dendrochronologically dated to circa 1100-25. Some bronze pins have also been found dating to around the same time, while further archaeological evidence suggests that much metal working was taking place at, and around, Lann during the eleventh century.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 87 and Warner, 'On crannogs and kings', 61-69.

<sup>151</sup> These do not appear in *BCh*, nor are the original Irish names to be found in any sources I have come across. Correspondence with both the Placenames Database of Ireland and Ordnance Survey Ireland has also yielded no results. The Placenames Database note that the islands are present on maps of the nineteenth century, but that they are not named. Similarly, names for the islands are not present on the seventeenth-century *Hibernia Regnum* barony maps, which I was graciously provided copies of by the OSI.

<sup>152</sup> Karkov and Ruffing, 'The crannógs of Lough Ennel: a computer survey', 110-111.

<sup>153</sup> Walsh, 'The Ua Maélechlainn kings of Meath', 171.

<sup>154</sup> Karkov and Ruffing, 'The southern Uí Néill and the political landscape of Lough Ennel', 338.

<sup>155</sup> Farrell 'The Crannog Archaeological Project (CAP). Archaeological Field Research in the Lakes of the West Midlands of Ireland', 102-103.

That the site was strengthened greatly at this juncture is unsurprising, given the fragile political situation in Mide during the twelfth century.<sup>156</sup> It is possible that the author of the Life took the fortification of the Clann Cholmáin stronghold as an opportunity to remind the secular powers that Colmán had blessed it, ensuring its defensive success as a fortress. The Life also mentions a number of property claims at this juncture (§59, 62). The author may have seen fit to include these as a reminder that the expansion of the royal site should not encroach on lands claimed by Lann. However, very few of these place-names can be securely identified. Walsh points out that the site of Ruba Conaill, mentioned in the text (§62), may have been associated with the Mide kings.<sup>157</sup>

A telling episode in the text relates the outraging of Cú Chaille mac Dublaide,<sup>158</sup> king of Fir Thulach, by the seizing of both his land and wife by Conchubhar Úa Máel Sechnaill, king of Mide (§50). The former figure is given an obit in the year 1021,<sup>159</sup> while the latter does not accede to the kingship until 1030,<sup>160</sup> his obit occurring under the year 1073.<sup>161</sup> During the reign of Cú Chaille, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnall is, in fact, king of Mide, and over-king of Fir Thulach. However, Conchubar may have been active as heir-apparent in Mide before beginning his reign. This mention of Cú Chaille and Conchubar indicates that *BCh* drew on traditions at least as late as the eleventh century. An even later date may be suggested if one supposes that it is unlikely that details of Conchubar's life, revealing the king in an unfavourable light (§50), would have been utilised close to the period of his reign. Would Lann have risked the disfavour the Mide royal dynasty? The name Mac Dublaide, variously Uí Dublaide and Úa Dublaich survives today as O'Dooley.<sup>162</sup> As petty kings in otherwise Uí Néill territory, it is unsurprising that scant records of the successive rulers of this group remain. The annals provide some information, mostly from the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>163</sup> Historical sources provide little other information on the Fir Thulach dynasty,

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<sup>156</sup> Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', 19-21.

<sup>157</sup> Walsh, 'The Ua Maélechlainn kings of Meath', 171.

<sup>158</sup> Obit given by AFM s.a. 1021

<sup>159</sup> AFM.

<sup>160</sup> AU, AFM.

<sup>161</sup> AU, AFM.

<sup>162</sup> Mac Fhirbhisigh, *Genealogies*, 474.6.

<sup>163</sup> AFM records the obits of Fiachna and Cú Dúilich, the two sons of Dubhlaich, *dá tigherna Fear Tulach* 'two lords of Fir Thulach' in 978; Cú Caille mac Dubhlaichtigherna *Fear Tulach* 'lord of Fir Thulach' in 1021; Úa Dublaich, lord of Fir Thulach *do mharbhadh dia mhuintir féin* 'was killed by his own people' in 1040.

save for an item from the twelfth century, which records that in 1144 Conchubar, son of Toirdelbach Ua Conchubair of Connacht, who had been given the kingship of Westmeath by his father, king of Ireland, was killed by the Fir Thulach king, Ua Dublach. The annals record that Conchubar was killed *uair ba rí eachtair-cheneóil lais a bheith-siomh i ríge uas Fearaibh Midhe* ‘for he [Ua Dublach] considered him [Conchubar] a stranger in sovereignty over the men of Meath’.<sup>164</sup> This seems to suggest a strong sense of loyalty on the part of the Fir Thulach to their local over-lords, who had been previously kings of Meath until the kingship was given by Toirdelbach to his son. That such loyalty is not presented in the Life may suggest that it was composed before the reign of Ua Dublach.

Following Conchubar’s death in 1073, his son Máel Sechnaill fought successfully for the kingship with his cousin, Murchad. After his reign, his son, also Conchubar, succeeded. Following the death of Conchubar mac Máel Sechnaill in 1105,<sup>165</sup> the kingship of Mide was assumed by the descendants of Flann, Conchubar mac Domnall’s brother, whom the latter had blinded in order to remove his claim to the kingship in 1037.<sup>166</sup> It may be surmised that Lann may have not used material which cast unwholesome light on the character of Conchubar, accurate though it may have been, until the succession of those more amenable to such publication. Thus, following the death of the last direct descendant of Conchubar Ua Máel Sechnaill in 1105, Lann was able to voice the outrage of its local Fir Thulach kings at past wrongs without having to lose the confidence and support of their Clann Cholmáin overlords.

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<sup>164</sup> AFM s.a. 1144.

<sup>165</sup> AU.

<sup>166</sup> Walsh, ‘The Ua Maélechlainn kings of Meath’, 169-171.



## 2.4 The Date of *Betha Cholmáin* - Linguistic Evidence

*Is ed sin indisitt na senchusa næma...* ‘This is what the holy ancient writings relate...’ (§106)

As has been discussed previously, internal information contained within the text, together with archaeological and historical data, shows that *BCh* is unlikely to have existed in its current format previous to the last quarter of the eleventh century. Whether sections of the text were already in evidence at an earlier date is difficult to say, but certainly the Life as it survives points to a date of compilation in the late eleventh, or more probably, early twelfth century. I have two main questions: (1) does the language of the text support this dating, and (2) what else can the linguistic features of the text reveal?

*BCh* is an unusually long text, especially given its production at a small ecclesiastical settlement for which almost no other source of information survives. A detailed linguistic examination of the whole text is beyond the scope of this study, as the aim of the current work is to take a multidisciplinary approach to reveal what the Life may tell us. Such a detailed examination would be most welcome, and would doubtless provide additional material for the study of Middle Irish. However, for the purposes of the current work, a selective approach will be taken. Representative sections of the text will be examined in detail including:

- Some which show some early or conservative features (§§104-106)
- One which contains the latest historical details in the Life (§50)
- Some which seem to be representative of the general language of the Life (§§10, 66)
- Some which include poetic materials (§§11, 67).

The results of these investigations will then be incorporated into the overall argument concerning the dating of the Life.

## §10

### • The Article

There are seven examples of the article in this passage. Of note are the preservation of the Old Irish nominative singular feminine form ending in ‘*d*’ (before vowels, *f*, *l*, *n* and *r*) in *Ind aidchi* (l.12),<sup>167</sup> and the disyllabic genitive plural of the article in *Tír inna Copán* (l.17). The latter preservation is likely due to its being petrified in a placename; compare *Tír na Copán* in the same section (l.16). The other examples of the article in the passage are singular *in/an* and plural *na*, regardless of gender or case. The later form *an*, beside earlier *in*, is likely to represent orthographical variance on the part of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century copyist of the text. Such orthographical changes are widespread in the Life, and do not provide dating criteria.

### • The Noun

There is preservation of many historically correct forms throughout the passage, e.g. *io*-stem masculine genitive singular *usci* (l.16) and *iá*-stem accusative singular *iarmérgi* (l.20). There is also preservation of the neuter inflection in *o*-stem accusative plural *na ceola adamra* (l.21). Its survival may be due to being petrified in a standard religious phrase, though examples of later *ceoil* are not attested in the Life.<sup>168</sup>

Oblique cases of *á*-stem *breth* are regularly written *breith* but note the use of the earlier form viz. *a brith* (l.18).

Note the loss of nasalisation in the temporal accusative: *Ind aidchi* (l.12), *in aidchi-sin* (ll.14, 19). However, there is preservation of nasalisation after the accusative singular of the definite article in *immon mBethil* (ll.23-4). There is loss of distinction in unstressed final vowels in many cases, viz. *o*-stem accusative plural *na ceola* (l.21), but *ceolu* (l.23).<sup>169</sup> This is evidence of the devolution of this final vowel to a generalised /*ə*/ phoneme.

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<sup>167</sup> Where not petrified in a placename, there are only four other examples of the article ending in *-nd* in *BCh*, viz. *ind usci-sa* (§13), *ind aidche sin* (§20), *ind uird sin* (§26) and *ind oirett sin* (§45).

<sup>168</sup> On changes in nominal declension, see Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 81-82, and Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 240-250.

<sup>169</sup> This may be evidence of *ceolu* being treated as a masculine, but it is difficult to tell from the manuscript whether the scribe intended an open ‘a’ or a ‘u’.

- **The Adjective**

Use of the adjective is largely conservative, including an example of agreement with a noun in the dative plural, viz. *do mnáib torchaib* (1.11). However, note the comparative form *amra* (1.22), for historically correct *amru*, which demonstrates loss of distinction in unstressed final vowels, versus *binniu* (1.22) which shows retention of the historically correct ending.<sup>170</sup>

- **The Pronoun**

There are no examples of independent object pronouns in this passage. There is a sole example of the third singular feminine Class A infixed pronoun in *Rosfuc* (1.15) used to refer to a male figure (Colmán). This is an example of the general spread of ‘s’ to all third singular forms, regardless of gender.<sup>171</sup>

- **The Preposition**

Forms seem regular throughout; note, however, the scribal variance in *ic* (1.22) rather than usual *oc*, where the former seems to be the more common later Middle-Irish literary standard used almost exclusively with verbal nouns.<sup>172</sup>

- **The Verb**

This section shows the preservation of numerous Old-Irish verbal forms, including: *doralae* (<*do-cuirethar*>), (1.9) *ní rabae* (<*at-tá*>) (1.10), *dorúacht* (<*do-roich*>) (1.14), *ro batsed* (<*baitsid*>) (1.16), *ro fasted* (<*ad-suidi*>) (1.18), *ro chúaladar* (1.20) and *ní clos* (both <*ro-cluinethar*>) (1.21) *do rónsat* (1.23).

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<sup>170</sup> See Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 90, and Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 256-257.

<sup>171</sup> See discussion in Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 93-95. See also McCone, *The Early Irish Verb*, 185-186, and Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 265-268.

<sup>172</sup> Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 100.

## §11

- **The Meter**

The metrical system of this verse section is imperfect at the beginning and towards the end.<sup>173</sup> The metrical system is  $2(7^3 + 7^3 + 5^1)$  which seems to be an extended version of *cro-cummaisc eter chassbairdni 7 leth-rannaigecht*,<sup>174</sup> with the exception of the first half of the first stanza ( $2(6^3 + 6^3 + 5^1)$ ) and the second half of the last two stanzas ( $3(7^3) + 5^1$ ). Though meter may often be irregular, the fact that the exceptions are at the head and foot of the poem may indicate that the poetry as it is contained in the manuscript was altered to include extra material at a later date than the core verses.

- **The Article**

The article in this section is not diagnostic with regard to date. There are two examples of the singular article in the passage, viz *in t-ennac* (1.16), *na trinóiti* (1.5). There are two examples of the plural article, viz. *na nduálach* (1.14), *na mórrígu* (1.22).

- **The Noun**

Nominal forms are largely conservative, showing preservation of accusative plural forms in rhyming position, e.g. *io*-stem *tigernu* (1.23) (: *morrígú* (1.22)) and *o*-stem *lebránu* (1.28) (: *scélmóire* (1.29)). However, compare *mórrígu*, where *mórríga* would be expected.

Of note is the inflection of an original *n*-stem *saltair* as a *k*-stem: genitive singular *saltrach* (1.30). Interestingly, genitive plural *duálach* (p.12, 1.14), from Old Irish *dúalig*, is treated as a tri-syllable as per the meter, but note the Middle-Irish form where original *dúalcha* would be expected.

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<sup>173</sup> For a general discussion on the metrical system in Middle Irish poetry, see Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* (1961).

<sup>174</sup> See Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*, 61.

The treatment of *nia* (p.10, l.29) and *lia* (p.12, l.4) as monosyllables does not provide useful dating criteria. Such treatment is attested from the eighth-century.<sup>175</sup>

- **The Adjective**

Note agreement in the dative plural, viz. *ar secht [m]bliadnaib buand[b]lib* (p.14, l.5).

- **The Pronoun**

There are neither infixed pronouns nor independent object pronouns in the passage.

- **The Preposition**

Note, for instance, the preservation of nasalisation in the accusative, viz. *fri diabul ndær ndub* (p.12, l. 12) and *cen nach n-adbar n-uile* (p.12, l.18), but compare with the use of the dative after a preposition which originally governed the accusative, viz. *etir orbaib* (p. 14, l. 12)

The use of *re*, in *retaeb saltrach* (p. 12, l. 30) for *fri* is generally a Middle Irish feature, but one which is attested as early as the Old-Irish glosses.<sup>176</sup>

- **The Verb**

Instances of the copula remain generally straightforward throughout this section. All examples are in the future tense, with the passage showing nineteen examples of third singular *bid*, and one each of third plural *bet* (p.10, l.13), third singular conjunct *-ba* (p.14, l.7) and third singular relative *bus* (p.14, l.14).

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<sup>175</sup> On the development of disyllabic hiatus vowels, see Carney, *The Poems of Blathmac*, xxvi-xxix. On the dating of these poems see xxviii-xix.

<sup>176</sup> See McCone, 'The Würzburg and Milan Glosses', 88-89. The entry for *fri* in DIL also gives specific examples of *re* being used instead in the Milan glosses, viz. *oc eregin re Abisolon* (ML 44<sup>b</sup>4) and a *llethe rissa n-ingraim* (ML 30<sup>b</sup>2).

The original third singular reduplicated relative future form of *ganithir* is attested, viz. *gignither* (p.10, l.26), with *geinfe* (p.14, l.11) in the same passage. The latter form is an *f*-future developed from the later stem *gein-*.<sup>177</sup> Interestingly, the later form is present in the section of verse which shows a departure from the meter of the preceding stanzas (see above).

A sole instance of the substantive verb may be seen in the future third singular *nocha bia cair collaidhi* (p.12, l.13). However, note the use of the later form *nocha*, rather than earlier *nícon*,<sup>178</sup> which would give the same syllable count. The form *nocha* is also attested elsewhere in *BCh*,<sup>179</sup> while there are no examples of *nicon* in either prose sections or poetic material.

## **§50**

- **The Article**

The article is generally *in/an* in the singular and *na* in the plural and genitive singular feminine, regardless of gender or case. There are four examples of the original form of the singular article in the paragraph, viz. *an ferann in Dúne na Carrge* (l.10), *isin Léna na Carrcci* (l.12), *for in cléith* (l.29) and *lucht in bale* (l.30); this may be compared to six instances of *an* found therein. As outlined above, this later form may be scribal. Further orthographical variants between *i* and *a* are *isbert* (l.13) and *ana* (l.29).

The use of the ‘double’ article is noteworthy here. Séamus Ó Gealbháin has noted that it is primarily a feature of Old Irish and often found in the glosses of religious texts from the eighth century, though it is not uncommon in later Middle-Irish sources such as LL and LU.<sup>180</sup> There are two examples in this passage, viz. *an ferann in Dúne na Carrge* (l.10), *isin léna na Carrcci* (l.12).

<sup>177</sup> DIL, *gainithir*. On the spread of the *f*-future, see Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 315-316.

<sup>178</sup> Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 105.

<sup>179</sup> In prose: *noco piantar* (p.28, l.26), *Nocha bía cenn talmanda acam-sa acht Mochutta namá* (p.86, ll.13-14), *fo ngébthar nocha cuirfithé hé* (p.94, l.26) and *nocha ferr leis beith ar búuib ná ar graigib Maél Sechlainn* (p.38, ll.30-31). While in verse: *nocha fáigbe bás* (p.36, l.23)

<sup>180</sup> S. Ó Gealbháin, ‘The double article and related features of genitive syntax in Old Irish and Middle Welsh’, *Celtica* 22 (1991) 119-144, at 125-126 and 128-129. Ó Gealbháin notes twelve examples in LU, eighteen in LL and generally remarks upon a ratio of about 1:3 of the ‘double’ article used in later sources versus earlier glosses.

- **The Noun**

Preservation of neuter inflection may be seen in the accusative plural form of *n*-stem *teidm*, viz. *tedmann* (1.15). Distinctive accusative and dative singular forms of the *á*-stem are also preserved, respectively *Saidid a bachaill* (1.12); *dia bachaill* (1.23), *'na timc[h]ill* (1l.23-4) and *for in cléith* (1.29).

However, compare instances of *rígan* which show reinterpretation of an original *í*-stem as an *á*-stem, viz. nominative singular *an rígan* (1.18) (Old Irish *rígain*), and dative singular *rígain* (1.19) (Old Irish *rígnai*).<sup>181</sup>

- **The Pronoun**

There are no infixed pronouns in this passage. Independent object pronouns are consistently used throughout, seven examples being present, viz. *boccaid immacúairt hí* (1.13), *co ruc an rí ar éicin hí* (1.18), *sin céiben dib ruc hí* (1.20), *is é robennachhí* (1.22), *is e robennach íatt* (1.27) and *is é robendach hí* (1.28). Note also the Middle Irish third plural form of the independent pronoun in the zero-copula sentence *lucht an bale iart[h]araig íatt* (1.30). As John Carey has shown, independent object pronouns began to be used in the early decades of the eleventh century, though sparingly, becoming more frequent in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.<sup>182</sup>

- **The Preposition**

The use of *la* with the dative, shown in *la Hib Domnán* (1.29), rather than the accusative, side by side with its regular usage—*la Hú Tegtechán* (1.28) is a Middle Irish development. So too is the use of *ar* for earlier *for*, with both attested in the passage, viz. *ar in slicht* (1.20) and *for in cléith* (1.29).<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> See Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 247.

<sup>182</sup> Carey, 'Remarks on Dating', 4-5.

<sup>183</sup> See the discussion on *ar*, *for* and *iar* in Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 98-99 and Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 326-327.

- **The Verb**

Instances of the copula remain generally straightforward throughout this section; *conid* (l.14), a later variant of Old Irish *condid*, is present, but this may simply be an orthographical variant.<sup>184</sup>

Features are in evidence which point to a later date of composition, e.g. *dligid* being used with an active voice and a direct object, viz. *dligid Colmán a dechmad-sin* (l.21). An indication of the general spread of the *s*-preterite in the Middle-Irish period may be seen in the use of the third plural past tense of the simple verb *cuinnchid*, from earlier *con-dieg*, viz. *ro cuinnichsit* (l.11). Here, the third plural ending in conjunct position is the original absolute form.<sup>185</sup>

## **§66**

- **The Article**

There are three examples of the singular article *an* in the passage and none of the plural, viz. *An bale* (l.14), *an aidchi-sin* (l. 16), *an cimid* (l.23). Note the lack of nasalisation in the temporal accusative in the second example (originally *in n-aidchi-sin*).

- **The Noun**

Nominal forms are generally straightforward.

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<sup>184</sup> Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, 93 §151 (c) and 486 §798 .

<sup>185</sup> See the discussion on *s*- and *t*- preterites in Breatnach, (1994) 300-307, specifically at 306; Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 132 and McCone, *The Early Irish Verb*, 256



- **The Pronoun**

There is one example of an infixed pronoun in this passage, though its use is pleonastic, viz. *atconnairc* (p.70, l.1)<sup>186</sup>. There is a sole example of an independent object pronoun, viz. *Bendachais hé* (l.11).

- **The Preposition**

Forms seem regular throughout.

- **The Verb**

Examples of the substantive are regular, viz *an bale i mbeo-sa* (l.14), *is ann bias Maelodrán* (l.14). The copula is regular, viz. *ní ba briathar* (l.15) and *conid* (p.70, l.1).

The prototonic form of a compound verb is correctly preserved in *ní chumgabat* (l.24); independent use of the prototonic is also attested, viz. *tánicc* (l.16). Further examples which preserve compound forms, but show orthographical variance with the preverb are *isbert* (ll. 11,13), *atpert* (l.17) and *ispert* (p. 70, l.2).

Of note are the new simple verbs, for example third singular *s*-preterite *rochuinig* (l.12) from *cuinnchid* (<*con-dieig*); third singular present indicative *féimdhidh* (l.13) (<*fo-émid*) and third singular present indicative *élaid* (l.16) derived from the prototonic stem of *as-luí*. Note also the second singular future of *téit,ragha* (l.24), with future stem, *reg-* reducing to *rag-* in the Middle Irish period.

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<sup>186</sup> For discussion see Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 284-285.

## §67

- **The Meter**

The meter of this poem is *cro-cummaisc eter chassbairdni 7 leth-rannaigecht*:  $2(7^3 + 5^1)$ ,<sup>187</sup> but in the last three quatrains  $7^1$  occurs at times instead of  $7^3$ . The poem is six quatrains long, the first three being a good example of this meter, while the second three show some minor variations. Rhyme is consistent throughout, following an *abcb* pattern in which the final words of the first and third lines rhyme, though the rhyme does not strictly follow the rules of this type of meter, where *abab* would be expected.

- **The Article**

There are five examples of the article in this passage. All are singular. Of these, four take the form *an*, viz. *ar an cuimrehtaig* (1.3), *Mocholmócc an t-ordnait[h]i* (1.5), *for an lár* (1.11), *uile an bith* (1.13), while one takes the form *in*, viz. *in Colmán fil acaib-si* (1.4)

- **The Noun**

Preservation of neuter inflection may be seen in the accusative plural form of *n*-stem *teidm*, viz. *tedmann* (1.8).

Note the loss of *u*-affection in the dative of *io*-stem *ríge*, *cona rígi inníu* (1.13), where the original form would be *rígu*. Dative *u*-affection is also absent in *ar mo chind-sa* (1.4), though this is attested side by side with *ciund* from the Old Irish period.<sup>188</sup>

There is loss of distinction of final unstressed vowels in *is amrai* (1.3) (originally *as amru*).<sup>189</sup> Note also orthographical variance between *d* and *tt* as discussed here previously in *imatt* (1.5) rather than *imad*, a later form of Old Irish *o*-stem neuter *imbed*.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*, 61.

<sup>188</sup> See Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, 177, §278.

<sup>189</sup> Meyer, *Betha Cholmáin maic Luacháin*, 117

<sup>190</sup> DIL *imbed*.

- **The Pronoun**

There are no examples of independent object pronouns in this passage.

Examples of infixed pronouns are: first singular Class A *nímt[h]a* (1.6), third singular Class B *notogébad* (1.12) and third singular Class A *nosrirfind* (1.14). In the first two examples, use is as per Old Irish, *notogébad* referring to *s*-stem neuter noun *nem*. Compare the feminine infixed pronoun in *nosrirfind*, referring to *u*-stem masculine noun *bith*. This shows the spread of *s* into all third singular forms of the infixed pronoun, regardless of gender.<sup>191</sup> The form of the verb is also late, as discussed below. The pleonastic use of the third singular neuter infix pronoun Class B with *ad-cí* is a regular feature of Middle-Irish, and is attested here: *Atchíu-sa* (1.3).<sup>192</sup>

- **The Preposition**

Examples of prepositions are generally straightforward.

- **The Verb**

While examples of Old-Irish compound verbs are still in evidence, viz. *atchíu-sa* (1.3), *doní* (1.6), *forragart* (1.6), the forms given are late.<sup>193</sup>

Note the later use of the conditional tense in place of the subjunctive,<sup>194</sup> viz. *dia taethsad* (1.11) (<*do-tuit*), and the incursion of the *f*-future into older reduplicated forms (though preserving the reduplicated stem *rir*-), viz. *nosrirfind*, from the simple verb *renaid*.<sup>195</sup> The

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<sup>191</sup> See Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 93-95. See also McCone, *The Early Irish Verb*, 185-186, and Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 265-268.

<sup>192</sup> For discussion see Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 284-285.

<sup>193</sup> Note the numerous attestations of later *atchíu* in DIL under *ad-cí*. Similarly, *doní* under *do-gní*.

<sup>194</sup> Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 125-126 and 129.

<sup>195</sup> On the spread of the *f*-future, see Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 315-316.

third singular present indicative active use of *dligid* with a direct object, *ná dlig a rún* (1.11), is also a later feature.<sup>196</sup>

## **§§104-106**

- **The Article**

The article is generally *an* in the singular and *na* in the plural, regardless of gender or case. Note the example of the dative singular article in the section, viz. *isin rainn tanaisti* (p.104, 1.31), where *isind rainn* would be expected in Old Irish.

Note the form *don aidchi* (p.104, 1.29), where *dond aidchi* would be expected in the Old-Irish dative. While the occurrence of *-nd* is not uncommon in Middle Irish, its reduction to *-n* is far more common from the eleventh century onward.<sup>197</sup>

The ‘double’ article, discussed previously, is also present in these sections. Examples occur in *don Choimdid na ndúla* (p.104, 1.19) and *ar an Coimdid na ndúla* (p.104, 1.25).

- **The Noun**

The majority of nominal forms function in a conservative manner, but note the loss of distinction in unstressed final vowels e.g. *io*-stem *todochaidi* (originally *todochaide*).

- **The Adjective**

There is agreement between nouns and adjectives in the accusative plural, viz. *etir na himacallma anglecda 7 na cumsanta díada* (p.106, 1.8). There is also agreement between nouns and adjectives in the dative plural, viz. *triasna haentib cíanastib* (p.106, 1.2) and

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<sup>196</sup> The *á*-stem feminine direct object, *rún*, is not inflected in the accusative singular case (originally *rúin*).

<sup>197</sup> See Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 79.

*triasna frithairib aidhib* (l.3). However, note the use of the preposition, *tri / tre* with the dative, a preposition which originally governed the accusative.

- **The Pronoun**

As seen earlier, the pleonastic use of the third singular neuter infix pronoun Class B with *ad-cí* is a feature of Middle-Irish, viz. *atchíam-ne tú* (p.106, l.6). Note also the independent object pronoun attested here. Independent object pronouns are not otherwise found in this section.

- **The Preposition**

The treatment of *tri / tre* is noteworthy. In Old Irish, the preposition was used with the accusative;<sup>198</sup> however, note its use with the dative plural noun preserving the dative plural adjective in agreement, viz. *triasna haeintib cíanastib* (p.106, l.2) and *triasna frithairib aidchidib* (p.106, l.3).

- **The Verb**

There are numerous instances of Old-Irish compound verbs retained in this section, viz. *do-rigne-sim* (l.14), *dogéna* (p.14, l.17), *dogníd* (ll.29, 30, 32 etc). Note also retention of the *s*-subjunctive in *mane tísad* (l.14).

Of note are a number of verbal forms showing later developments. The conditional tense is used in place of the subjunctive form of *do-tuit*, viz. *do-faetsad*, ‘were to fall / should fall’ (l.17).<sup>199</sup> Two examples of an *s*-preterite of *do-rorban*, viz. *roforbanastar* (p.106, ll.2,7) show the general spread of the *s*-preterites during the period and also show intrusion of a prosthetic

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<sup>198</sup> Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, 533

<sup>199</sup> DIL *do-tuit*. Note examples such as Fut. 1 s. *dofóethus*, *dofóethus-[s]a*, *cia do-faethus-sa*, 2 s. *dofáithais*, *dafaethais*, 3 s. *dofóeth*, *dofaeth*. 2 pl. *dofaethsaid*. 3 pl. *dofóethsat*, *dofaethsat*, *dofaesat*. Condit. 1 s. *dofaethsaid*. 3 s. *dofaithesté-su*, *dofaethaisté-su*. 3 s. *dofáithsad*, *dofaethsad*, *dofaetsat*, *-sad*. See discussion on the development of the conditional in Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 129.

‘f’.<sup>200</sup> The form is unusual, but is present in material relating to Patrick in the Lebor Breac.<sup>201</sup> Of note also are examples of *indisitt* (p.106, ll.3,9), the third plural present indicative form of the simple verb *indisid* (from the verbal noun *indisiu*) which replaces Old Irish *in(d)-fet/ad-fét*.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, *no heterscarad* (p. 104, l.31) is the third singular imperfect indicative of a simple verb, (<eter-scara).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> See White, *Compert Mongáin*, 32 and McCone, *Early Irish Verb*, 199-200.

<sup>201</sup> DIL, *do-rorban* I. See also Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*, introduction, cxxvi.

<sup>202</sup> DIL s.v. *indisid*. Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, 451 §730.

<sup>203</sup> DIL s.v. *eter-scara*

## 2.5 The Date of *Betha Cholmáin* – General Conclusions

This section began with two main questions: (1) does the language of the text support the most likely date of composition supplied by internal evidence? and (2) what else can the linguistic features of the text reveal? To answer these questions, I will provide general commentary on the linguistic features of the text and then compare these features with other non-linguistic dating information.

On the whole, the language points to a composite text. In the sections analysed above, some seem to contain markedly more Middle Irish features, while other remain largely more conservative, which may point to an earlier date of composition for these sections. However, none of the sections analysed are written in Old Irish. Some later features appear in what are seemingly the most conservative of the sections provided, viz. §10, §11 and §§104-106, constituting the beginning and end of the Life. Similarly, the passage which seems to be the most easily identifiably Middle Irish, §50, nonetheless retains some earlier features. Taking into account the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century copyist of the text, together with more general scribal variance, this suggests that a 12<sup>th</sup>-century hagiographer had earlier material at his disposal, but also composed new material and/or altered older information to suit his purpose. An overview of each of the linguistic features lends support to this analysis.

### **The Article**

The article is largely not diagnostic regarding dating criteria, but some comments may be made. The sections examined all contain the general use of *an* in the singular and *na* in the plural, regardless of gender or case. Original *-nd* ending is lost in all cases, where it is not petrified in a placename (§50), bar one instance, §10. The ‘double’ article is also present in §50 and §§104-106. While this has been shown to be used in an earlier setting, its use in Middle Irish is not unknown.

## **Nouns**

Each of the sections contains preservation of original nominal forms. Perversely enough, preservation of neuter inflection is to be seen in the sections containing the most numerous later forms (§§50, 67). The more conservative sections contain numerous Middle Irish forms such as the loss of distinction of final unstressed vowels (§§10, 104-106) and changes in nominal declension (§11). These Middle Irish developments are also present in §§50 and 67.

## **Adjectives**

Most forms of the adjective show agreement with the preceding noun in either the accusative or the dative, most notably in the dative plural, e.g. §§104-106. There is loss of distinction in the final unstressed vowel in §§10 and 11. The rest of the examples remain conservative.

## **Pronouns**

The use of pronouns in the analysed sections is noteworthy. Correctly used infixed pronouns may be seen in §67, a section of verse, but this section also includes an example of the spread of general *s* to all instances of the infixed pronoun. §10 also demonstrates an example of this type of infixed pronoun. §11, a section of verse, contains no infixed pronouns whatsoever. The pleonastic use of infixed pronouns is attested in §§66, 67 and 104-106 (one example). Independent object pronouns, which become increasingly frequent in the late eleventh century, are found in §50 (which contains no infixed pronouns), §66 and §§104-106.

## **Prepositions**

Scribal variance aside, forms are generally regular throughout all sections except in §50, which regularly has the dative after prepositions originally governed by the accusative. §§104-106 also show examples of this. Also of note is the Middle Irish *ic* (rather than original *oc*) in §10.



## Verbs

Undoubtedly the most diagnostic of sections, the treatment of verbs reveals much about a likely date of compilation of the text. The analysed sections above show examples of the preservation of the historically correct forms, though it is noteworthy that the majority of these are common verbs, whose usage is well attested into the Middle Irish period and beyond. Instances of developments within the language during the Middle Irish period are also to be seen in all sections. Instances of the copula and the substantive remain generally straightforward in most cases, with no notable exceptions (scribal variance aside) providing specific dating criteria. Other examples show more demonstrative changes. The use of prototonic forms of compound verbs in independent position may be seen in §§10, 11 and 66. The form *tánicc* becomes regular throughout all sections, though its independent use begins at a relatively early date. Later stems may be seen in numerous places, especially in §11, where a later stem *gein-*, in *f*-future *geinfe*, is used alongside the original reduplicated future *gignither* (<*ganither*). The use of the former sheds light on the composition of this section of verse and will be examined below separately. The spread of the *s*-preterite into all forms of the past tense, together with the use of the perfect, or augmented preterite, as the general past tense is evident in §§10, 50 and 104-106. The spread of the *f*-future into other forms of the future tense may be seen in §§11, 67 and 104-106. The use of the conditional, rather than the subjunctive, is present in §67, also a verse section.

## Verse

What can linguistic features reveal about the role of poetry in *BCh*? From the foregoing analysis, the examples, §11 and §67, are generally conservative with regard to meter and rhyme. However, both have inconsistencies. In the first instance, ‘*Amra gein gignither*’ (§11), the head and foot of the poem show fluctuation in meter, as well as noteworthy linguistic features, while the body of the text remains metrically consistent, though still demonstrating Middle Irish features. There are two mentions of Colmán in the poem. Of these, stanza one contains an original reduplicated future (*gignither*). Compare this with the last two stanzas, where Middle Irish *f*-future *geinfe* is used. The last two stanzas also mention details which are in evidence elsewhere in the *Life*, while the body of the poem has content more general to the genre of hagiography. Details specific to *BCh* in this latter section are the mention of his

*secht prímlrelgi* (l.1), the number of churches which Colmán founds, according to the Life. His age, one hundred and forty-seven years, is also mentioned (l.4). The instance of Christ appearing in the shape of a leper (ll.8-9) may be a common motif in hagiography, but nonetheless specifically appears in the Life (§57). The body of the text does not contain similar references specific to *BCh*. It therefore seems likely the beginning and end sections of §11 were added to and/or altered later to an existing poem. In the case of the first stanza, it is possible that it was taken from an earlier poem concerning a figure called Colmán, while the final two stanzas may have been composed at a later date specifically for the Life by an individual unable to compose the meter correctly.

In the case of “*Atcíu-sa*” *ar an cuimrehtaig*’ (§67) it is more difficult to ascertain its provenance based on linguistic detail or content. The first half of the poem is conservative with regard to meter while the second half is more inconsistent. No internal evidence seems to differentiate the two halves, while linguistically there are both early and later forms throughout.

### **Language and Content**

From the foregoing, it is most likely that, while remaining conservative in numerous instances, the hagiographer nonetheless uses language that he is familiar with, and that this language is unlikely to be earlier than the eleventh century, and certainly not later than the twelfth century. Does this linguistic analysis corroborate the internal evidence of the text?

As I have shown in the preceding section, the hagiographer attempts to set the Life in the sixth- or seventh-century setting, but numerous figures and events are historically attested as being far later. In fact, with the exception of some of the saintly figures in the text, as depicted in §§10 and 11, there is no evidence to suggest that any of it was composed at a date prior to the eighth century, at the very earliest. The role of the ecclesiastical institutions of Clonmacnoise and Rahan, mention of Viking invaders and the political stature of Clann Cholmáin confirm this. There is no linguistic evidence which points to a date of composition for any of the sections in the eighth century, and it may be assumed with confidence that any

allusion to a period prior to the eighth, or, more likely, ninth century is hagiographical convention.

As for a later date, the same reasoning applies, though it is more specific to certain sections of the Life. Individual figures such as Máel Sechnaill of Clann Cholmáin, Cú Cháille mac Dublaide and Conchubar Úa Máele Sechnaill are each historically attested. While the interactions between these figures in the Life may not be chronologically accurate, they are all nonetheless figures who lived in the eleventh century. One of the sections analysed above, (§50), deals specifically with Cú Cháille and Conchubar. Further, mention of the Clann Cholmáin stronghold at Cró-Inis and its refortification is an issue which the community at Lann seem to have taken very seriously based on evidence in the Life (§§59, 62). As I have shown previously, this refortification is unlikely to have occurred before the middle of the eleventh century. Indeed, the mention of the building of a causeway across the bog around Lann can be archaeologically dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century, and is specifically alluded to in the Life (§27). Does the language of the text support such a specific date? It is unlikely that such narrow parameters may be applied to the Life as a whole, but there is no archaeological evidence for an earlier causeway. One possibility is that this section of the text was a later addition to earlier materials, which strengthens the argument for its being a composite Life. Likewise, §50 gives a very specific timeframe for its composition, during or after the eleventh-century lifetime of Conchubar.

In conclusion, to assign a date to *BCh* we may consider two aspects of the text: non-linguistic evidence and linguistic evidence. Reconciliation of these two factors will provide the most likely window for the compilation of the Life.

### **Non-linguistic evidence.**

Discounting hagiographical literary convention, no internal evidence points to a date of the ninth century, at the very earliest. Further to this, contextual similarity to, and the hagiographer's familiarity with, the *Vita Tripartita* of Patrick would suggest a date of at least the late tenth century. Some more specific information still, such as the mention of historical figures and events, together with data that may be verified with recourse to archaeological

information, undeniably places this date into the eleventh century, if not the early twelfth century. The content of some sections of Life, together with the juxtaposition of prose and poetic sections, may suggest an earlier date of composition and the text itself alludes to using information from elderly members of the community (*senchusa naema*, §106), though this may be a literary standard phrase. Nevertheless, the evidence gives a clear indication for a final date of compilation which does not fall outside a window of more than fifty years or so.

### **Linguistic evidence.**

While some sections of the Life show fewer Middle Irish features than others, it is unlikely that the text was compiled before the beginning of the eleventh century, especially taking into account verbal development and the infixed versus independent pronoun ratio. There is also no linguistic evidence to consider a date much later than the middle of the twelfth century. Again, taking both poetry and prose into consideration, I think it likely that the text may have been composed in separate sections, though there is no linguistic evidence to suggest that any of these sections were composed earlier or later than the given timeframe.

Comparing and contrasting all the evidence, some conclusions may be drawn. While non-linguistic data can give a very specific *terminus a quo* for certain sections of the text, it is less useful for ascribing a date of composition for the more standard literary sections. Linguistic evidence alone paints a more general picture and gives a wider temporal window of compilation. However, taking this evidence in tandem with non-linguistic evidence, those sections to which it is more difficult to ascribe a date are given narrower parameters. Similarly, if the language is generally similar in numerous sections of text, non-linguistic information allows us to be more certain in the ascription of a date to many of these. On the whole, it seems that the text could not have been compiled outside of a window of roughly half a century. To propose an even narrower timeframe, the celebration of the Saint's feastday to coincide with the (supposed) discovery of his relics in 1122 would provide ample opportunity to unveil a new 'biography', compiled over the preceding number of years from some older materials, together with new composition containing contemporary information to suit a social, political and ecclesiastical needs of the community of the time.

## Chapter 3 – *BCh*: Narrative Features

*Araile scél dano forathmentur sund...* ‘Again another story is recorded here...’ (§16)

This section seeks to investigate the literary construction of *BCh*. The Life is a lengthy prosimetric work, the language of which throughout is largely consistent with a twelfth-century date. Internal features which might suggest the addition to, or expansion of, an earlier tradition are not immediately apparent. The composition of the Life will be investigated to illuminate any such features. The juxtaposition of prose and poetry may also prove elucidatory. By discussing the process involved in its composition, some conclusions regarding the role of *BCh* within its community may be inferred.

*BCh* is structured biographically. Following an homiletic preface, details of the birth of the saint are provided, followed by an account of his parentage and early years. The main body of the text concerns his monastic career, including the foundation of his main church at Lann, as well as other subsidiary foundations. Following the death of Colmán, some posthumous miracles are recorded, following which the Life is drawn to a close with further homiletic material. The Life, however, is not chronologically consistent. Interventions to the chronological narrative at times seem to relate to contemporary Lann rather than the seventh-century setting of the Life. It is possible that an earlier version of the Life existed, shown by the use of such phrases as *indisitt na senchusa naema* ‘as the holy ancient writings relate’ (§104).<sup>204</sup>

Mac Cana notes that the tenth and eleventh centuries saw an ‘increasing collaboration between *filid* and monastic *literati*... and corroborative reiterative verse seems to have then become something of a commonplace during the Middle Irish period’.<sup>205</sup> On linguistic grounds it is difficult to say whether the verse in *BCh* preceded or succeeded the prose, or

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. the composition of the *Vita Columbae* by Adomnán, who likely used the testimonies of ‘learned men’ or ‘informed people’, but may have also used an earlier work, by Cumméne, which describes Colum Cille’s miraculous powers. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 142-148 and Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St. Columba*, 56-57.

<sup>205</sup> Mac Cana ‘Notes on the Combination of Prose and Verse in Early Irish Narrative’, 138.

whether both were composed synchronically. Given the ‘increasing collaboration’ mentioned by Mac Cana, it is not difficult to imagine that the author of the Life would have possessed the skills and knowledge to compose the verse as well as the prose. In other Lives there are sections of verse referred to as having been sung, or composed, by a professional poet<sup>206</sup>. There are no such references in *BCh*, which suggests that the verse was either composed by an anonymous poet (or poet-cleric) or by the author of the Life. Closer examination of the versified material may help to illuminate to what extent it may have been composed separate from, or synchronically with, the prose material.

Professor Myles Dillon proposed that verse in medieval Irish literature functions as ‘dialogue to mark any heightening of the mood: love, anger, death’.<sup>207</sup> Is this feature applicable to *BCh*? Verse sections of the Life are usually introduced with the formula *conid and asbert X*, ‘so then X said...’ or *conid de asbert X*, ‘because of this X said/spoke...’ with variants thereon. Most of the poetry reiterates or paraphrases what has gone before it in prose. While the shift to verse might suggest a heightening of emotion such as Dillon had in mind, the context makes this unlikely. In fact, what pass for emotionally-charged episodes in *BCh* are more often represented by prose sections, such as Colmán’s destruction of the fort of Conall Guthbinn (§58), his gentle reprimanding of his mother for stealing the holy soil of Rome (§82), or indeed his altercation with Ciarán of Clonmacnoise (§85). Rather than verse being used to signal an emotionally heightened event, in the majority of cases in *BCh* its purpose is rather, as Mac Cana stated, ‘to set the seal of authenticity on the statement of the preceding prose’, becoming in fact, ‘a resumé of it’.<sup>208</sup> However, it must be noted that Mac Cana and Dillon refer to narrative material. While hagiography is certainly narrative, it functions with a clear audience in mind, and with clear intent, within its own conventions. Comparison with saga narratives may be useful in the context of Irish hagiography being composed by individuals who also may have been committing the sagas to vellum, but the similarity

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<sup>206</sup> See Plummer, *BNÉ* i: *Betha Beraig*, 29 (§32) *Chonid de sin ro chan an fili* ‘It was of this the poet sang’; 31, 32, 36 *respec.* (§44, 48, 64) *conidh de sin ro raidh an file* ‘hence it was that the poet said’; *Betha Brenainn Clúana Ferta*, 79 (§155) *amail asbert araile éolach* ‘as a certain learned man said’; *Betha Máedoc Ferna* ii, 192 (§8) *mar derbhas an fili* ‘as the poet said’, 198 (§30) *conidh da dherbadh sin adubairt an file* ‘it was to set forth this the poet said’, 213 (§79) *conid da dherbach atbert an fili amlaidh* ‘and it was to set forth this that a poet said thus’.

<sup>207</sup> Dillon, *The Archaism of the Irish Tradition*, 10.

<sup>208</sup> Mac Cana ‘Notes’, 137.

largely ends there. To elucidate the role of verse within the genre of medieval Irish hagiography, it must first be set in its wider context, then examined as a literary phenomenon.

That verse ‘sets a seal of authenticity’ is unsurprising. Details recorded in verse are easier to recall and less likely to change in transmission. Versification also grants authority to its subject matter. Verse is more likely to be remembered in an immediate and contemporary way, making constant reference to written documentation less necessary. Verse therefore would seem to be an ideal vehicle to claim property and tribute in the Life. However, with the exception of some examples detailed below, verse in *BCh* which reflects or retells the preceding, or following, prose does not seek to claim property or wealth. The primary function of the Life’s versification seems to be reinforcement of the saint’s claim to holiness.

The following seeks to investigate the author’s structuring of his material, and the manner in which he diverges from the main chronological storyline (marked by Roman numerals) to expand on information or to follow a thematic tangent.

**I** §1-26: Early Life and formative years. Study with Mochuta at Rahan and Lismore.

- §27-28: Information about the bell of Motura, the tomb of Motura and twelfth-century obligations on the wife of the *airchinnech* of Lann.

**II** §29-35: Foundation of Lann (version 1) and ordination of Colmán.

- §36-41: Incidental information and description of lands claimed from close family of Colmán.

**III** §42-44: Foundation of Lann (version 2). Introduction of Fursa.

- §45-46: Local onomastic information.

**IV** §47-54: Colmán befriends Fir Thulach king, is praised by Colum Cille and makes a pact with Bishop Conchraid.

- §55-70: Large section of the Life detailing the relationship between Conall Guthbinn and Colmán. Much property information.

**V** §71-72: Colmán spends time with Áedán at Ferns.

- §73-74: Colmán lifts the curse on the Clann Cholmáin dynasty. Land is granted to him by Domnall mac Murchada(†763).

**VI** §75-84: Colmán goes to Rome, returns and spends time in the midlands with various saints.

- §85: Episode in which Colmán refuses to acknowledge the supremacy of Ciarán of Clonmacnoise.
- §86-92: Colmán assists in a royal tryst and is given property for it. Further property granted by Clann Cholmáin.

**VII** §93-100: Death of Colmán, visitation of Fursa to Lann, Colmán delivers his ‘rule’.

- §101-102: Description of the entitlements of the Meath kings in the area, and punishment for transgressing against Lann.

**VIII** §103-106: Close of the Life

The Life itself is well constructed on the whole. The author is aware of the formulae and conventions in which he is working, from the homiletic opening (§1) right through to its close (§103-106). Throughout the Life there are distinct parallels with other hagiographical



works,<sup>209</sup> and representations of interactions with a large number of saints such as Mochuta (§20), Molaise (§26), Colmán Elo (§42, 76, 79), Colmán Comraire (§42, 76, 79), Colum Cille (§52), Ciarán (§85) and Fursa (§97-99). Episodes in the Life that focus on property transactions reflect contemporary preoccupations of the author, who appears to be based at Lann. Interspersed into this structured framework is much additional material. Episodes with a thematic similarity are grouped together in a way that departs entirely from the chronology of the main Life. The formulaic *araile scél*, ‘another story’, or *araile dano scél / araile scél dano*, ‘again, another story’ is often used to introduce areas of similar thematic content. The author also sometimes adds episodes relating to a topic or individual discussed much earlier in the Life, perhaps feeling it necessary to re-visit the material to include extra information (§91, 102).

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<sup>209</sup> Colmán is compared with Saints Patrick and Brigit (§55, 58). Some instances in *BCh* also closely resemble those in Patrician hagiography. See Chapter 6.1 - ‘Relics and Miracles of Colman and their function’ (*a*) *Miracles*.

### 3.1 The Early Years of Colmán (I)

*Ó doralæ immurgu Colmán mac Lúachán i mbroinn a máthar, ní rabæ cess ná galar ná guin ná tregat ná tortromad ná amnerti fuirri frisin ré-sin amail is bés do mnáib torchaib.* ‘From the time that Colman son of Luachán was in his mother's womb there was neither weariness nor sickness nor wound nor ache nor heaviness nor weakness upon her during that time, as is customary with pregnant women.’ (§10)

After an homiletic preface (I), the genealogies of Colman are provided (§3, 4), one of which is claimed to be his *genealogia vera*. The Life continues chronologically with the marriage of Colmán's parents, followed by a description of his paternal family, the brothers of Luachán, complete with details of their properties (§8). An account of the siblings of the saint follows, all of whom offer themselves *i n-ógiu don Chomdid* ‘in virginity to the Lord’. The migration of these siblings is recorded, and the areas in which they settled and founded religious establishments carefully noted (§8, 9). The initial verse section of the Life, attributed to Bishop Etchén, *Amra gein gignither* ‘A wonderful birth will be born’ (§11) acts as a synopsis of the Life to follow. It mentions, for instance, that Colmán will found ‘seven chief cemeteries’ (i.e. churches) and that he will ‘destroy tribes and lords if they do evil to him’. However, it also praises the saint for his gentleness, mercy and magnanimity. The syllabic metre of this verse section may indicate that it was composed at a later period to the remainder of the verse, as the metres contain more flaws than are found in the rest of the Life.<sup>210</sup>

A number of miracles related to the young saint are then mentioned. *Araile scél*, ‘another story’, or *araile dano scél / araile scél dano*, ‘again, another story’ is used a number of times in succession to relate the miracles of the youth in his locality (§13-17). Verse in the Life seems to follow the prose in enforcing Colmán's saintly status. This may be seen in *Mo mac, inmain hé* ‘My son, beloved is he’ (§14) in which the saint's mother marvels at her son's ability to remain unharmed under water for a day and night, in a manner reminiscent of the

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<sup>210</sup> BCh, 110, notes to p 10.

apostle, Paul (§13).<sup>211</sup> There is no strict sequence of events here, rather it appears that the intention was to include as much information as possible.

There follows (§19-26) the account of Colmán's stay with Mochuta of Rahan and Lismore. This seems to form an integral and important part of the Life as a whole,<sup>212</sup> For our current purposes, it serves to bring the story back to its 'original' chronology. The author relates that the youthful Colmán travels to Rahan to study with Mochuta (§18). Minor chronological departures follow (§19). The Life then returns to the saint's time spent with Mochuta, from the age of seven years, to the expulsion of Mochuta and his community from Rahan to Lismore ten years later.<sup>213</sup> The hagiographer moreover shows his familiarity with legends regarding Mochuta including a poem, *Cethri fichit sé fir déc 'Ninety-six men'* (§19) concerning the anger of the saint towards Blathmac, one of the primary instigators of Mochuta's expulsion, according to tradition.<sup>214</sup> This verse contains detail reminiscent of that found in *Indarba Mochuta a rRaithin / The Expulsion of Mochuta from Rahan*.<sup>215</sup>

A sizeable section of *BCh*, some ten episodes, relate to Mochuta, or make mention of his interaction with Colmán. Among these are episodes which again emphasise Colmán's saintly qualities, such as his tending to the lepers of Lismore (§20). Mochuta's verse, *Colmán lámglan, lór a gile*, 'Pure-handed Colmán, great his whiteness' (§22) reiterates this prose. Colmán also begins church foundations with the establishment of Cell Uird, today Kilworth, Co. Cork (§24).

As this section of the Life draws to a close (§26-28), we again see the author recounting an extra episode which falls outside the textual chronology, and does not involve Colmán directly. The episode of the gapped bell of Motura (§27) tells of the Corco Baiscinn king who

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<sup>211</sup> A reference to 2 Corinthians, xi, 25: 'a night and a day have I been in the deep' and 26: '... in perils of waters... in perils in the sea'.

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter 4.2 'Lann and its Ecclesiastic Neighbours'.

<sup>213</sup> AU s.a. 636, AFM s.a. 631, See also Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 92, notes for March 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>214</sup> C.f. Power, *The Lives of S.S. Declan and Mochuta*, 123-124; Plummer, *BNÉ*, vol ii, 289, §37.

<sup>215</sup> Plummer, *BNÉ*, vol ii, 298, §29. The phrasing and description of events following the expulsion are very similar.

went to offer himself and some of his men in service to Mochuta. The latter sends him away with a tongueless bell to travel around Ireland. Motura and his monks are told that the bell will ring at the place that God has designated as their destination. It rings at Lann. It is also said of Motura and his men *filet isin ulaid fata ar cúl eclaise Colmáin meic Lúacháin* '[it is] they who are to be found in the long tomb at the back of the church of Colmán mac Luacháin'. This telling detail suggests that the episode reflects a local commemoration. However, it is difficult to reconcile the data that Motura left Lismore a year before the death of Mochuta, the latter having died shortly following the expulsion from Rahan,<sup>216</sup> with the author's claim that Colmán spent seven years caring for the lepers at Lismore (§20). Perhaps the author, knowing the tradition of Motura's tomb at Lann, slotted this information into his account of Mochuta's relations with Colmán. Thus the incidental traditions of Lann are woven into the accepted framework of material relating to the saint and his history.

A further episode (§28) relates how some of Motura's people, claimed by the author to be related to the Dál Caiss, came to request a meal from the wife of the *airchinnech* of Lann. Being dissatisfied with her lack of preparation, the condition is stipulated that a meal must be prepared for seven of the monks of Lann every Easter Sunday, lest the wife be cursed. Though they attest remarkable links with both east and west Munster, the episodes relating to Motura bear little or no relevance to the chronology of the Life. We begin to see the mode of operation of our author from this evidence. He may well plan to follow the saint's Life from birth to death in a general way, but he feels compelled to import extra information at intervals. Perhaps this is to show off his knowledge of his subject, or perhaps to ensure no stone is left unturned in the interests of his work. What becomes clear is that biographical details about the saint are less important to the hagiographer than the additional information relevant to his patron's church, its rights and possessions.

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<sup>216</sup>AU s.a. 637, AFM s.a. 636.

### 3.2 The Career of Colmán and his Ecclesiastical Foundations (II-VI)

*O rosíacht-som immurgo aes .xxx. timairgid celebrad de Mochuta...* ‘When he had reached thirty years of age he asks leave of Mochuta...’ (§23)

#### • II

The main body of the Life, namely Colmán’s career in the midlands, now begins. After returning to Meath to visit his one-time tutor Etchén, he founds Lann (§29) and forms a union with two other Colmáns, Colmán Elo and Colmán Comraire. This section sees the beginning of Colmán’s dealings in the territory of Clann Cholmáin, the dynasty with whom the saint is genealogically connected (§4).<sup>217</sup> The three Colmáns receive ecclesiastical orders from Etchén, and an order of superiority is established with Colmán Elo foremost, Colmán mac Luacháin second and Colmán Comraire third (§31-35). Mochua also receives orders on the same day, and so Lann, Tech Mochua and Clonfad, the church of Etchén, form another union (§35).

Next, Colmán visits his uncles in order to request a grant of land. He is variously refused, given a meagre area, and eventually granted a sizeable property (§36, 37). The responses are accordingly chastised or rewarded. Of note here is the depth in which the author details not only the lands mentioned, but also which contemporary family groups were descended from the individuals in question.<sup>218</sup> There follows an account of how the land surrounding Lann itself, upon which the principal church of Colmán resided, was acquired (§39). Further details are given of the family who offer Colmán their land. Not only is every *bale* of land mentioned in great detail, but we are also told that for this reason the Uí Dubáin are the *fine griein* ‘glebal family’ at Lann.<sup>219</sup> Such detailed knowledge of the local surroundings reinforces the view that the Life was compiled at Lann itself.

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<sup>217</sup> See Chapter 1.1, ‘Genealogical Information’.

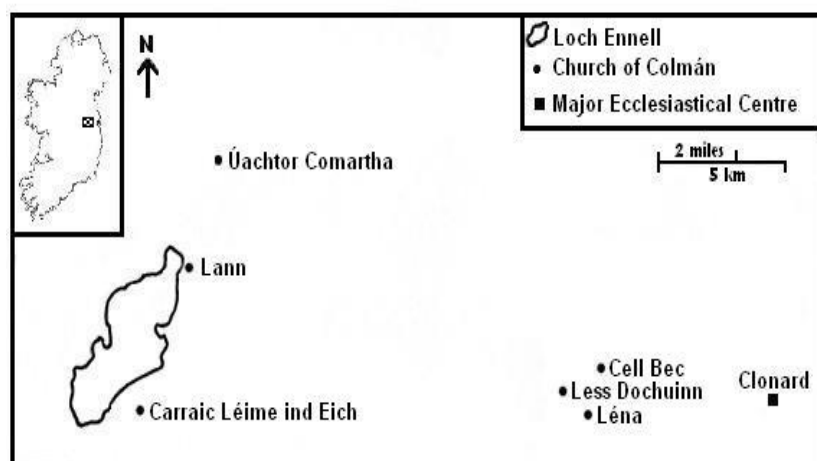
<sup>218</sup> See Fig. 2 – ‘The Lineage of Colmán’

<sup>219</sup> For information on the role of the glebal, or land-owning, family associated with monastic institutions, see Charles-Edwards ‘*Érlam*: the patron-saint of an Irish church’, 269-271.

The author continues with further accounts of how nearby land is donated to Colmán and Lann (§40, 41). The rights of these properties are detailed. While primarily casting the net of Lann over these property areas, hagiographical information places one of the property donors, Anniaraid, as craftsman of Lann during the reign of Máel Sechnaill over Meath (§41). The question of which ruler of this name is represented in the Life is impossible to say.<sup>220</sup>

### • III

*Dorónad tra tempall íarum dermár la Colmán mac Lúacháin ac Laind & tinóled tinchur fleidhi móire lais dia bennachad a thempuil ó epscopaib úaislib.* ‘Then a great church was built at Lann by Colmán son of Luachán, and the makings of a great feast were collected by him to have his church blessed by noble bishops.’ (§42)



**Map 3:** Churches claimed as founded by Colmán in BCh

The construction of the church of Lann (§42) occurs next, prefaced by the verse beginning *Colmán Lainde, flatha fine* ‘Colmán of Lann, chief of a tribe’ (§30), where the angel Victor

<sup>220</sup> Máel Sechnaill I and Máel Sechnaill II are given obits s.a. 862 and 1022 in AU respectively. See Chapter 2.3, ‘The Date of BCh – Internal Evidence’, (b) Evidence suggesting a date of at least the eleventh century, but not later than the twelfth century.

praises Colmán and notes that only one of every hundred buried in the cemetery at Lann shall go to hell. The new cemetery and church are celebrated by a feast to which a number of influential saints are invited, notably Colmán Elo, Colmán Comraire and Bishop Etchén. Also in attendance is Fursa, not a figure immediately associated with the west Midlands.<sup>221</sup> However, there seems to have been a tradition that the saint was brother to Colmán Comraire,<sup>222</sup> which suggests the author utilises this relationship to introduce a saint of some import to the Life.<sup>223</sup> As an act of homage from his kinsmen (§43), Colmán is given the area of Léna in Uí Fhorranáin territory as a *screpul soscélae* ‘gospel-tax’. Léna is presumably in close proximity to Mag Léna ‘the plain and heath of Moylen’,<sup>224</sup> situating it northeast of Durrow and thus either in, or near, the territory of the Upper Moyfenrath barony, in which the Uí Fhorranáin were resident, about ten miles to the east of Lann.<sup>225</sup>

That the author wished to allow for a retrospective ‘legal’ claim over a church in Léna<sup>226</sup> may be supported by the following miracle story, which recounts how the saint cured the foot of the king, Domnall mac Áedo (§44).<sup>227</sup> The hagiographer carefully mentions that seventeen estates of land were granted by the grateful Domnall to Colmán,<sup>228</sup> including a detailed account of the conditions under which the land was granted. The hagiographer also provides evidence that Colmán was associated with this region, having his name commemorated on a rock and a cave there (§45).

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<sup>221</sup> There may, however, be an association with Slane, in Meath. See Charles-Edwards *Early Christian Ireland*, 318, note 177.

<sup>222</sup> Fursa and Colmán Comraire are said to have the same mother, Brónach. See Ó Riain, *CGSH*, 131, 702.1-2 and 179, 722.92. See also Chapter 4.2, ‘Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours’.

<sup>223</sup> Fursa appears once again in the Life following the death of Colmán to act as his eulogiser (§97, 98).

<sup>224</sup> Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 523.

<sup>225</sup> See Map 7, Local family groupings mentioned in *BCh*.

<sup>226</sup> See discussion on the church at Léna in Chapter 4.1 ‘The *Paruchia* of Lann – Church Foundations’.

<sup>227</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 642. Domnall was a member of the royal house of Cenél Conaill, the northern branch of the Uí Néill, and a kinsman of Colum Cille. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 310. The hagiographer shows his knowledge of history here, noting that until the presented seventh-century setting of the Life, a succession of ‘Kings of Ireland’ had featured no member from Clann Cholmáin, the southern Uí Néill dynasty with which Colmán himself is associated.

<sup>228</sup> The phrase used in *BCh* (§44) is *secht mbale déc*. For a discussion on the *baile* system of land division in Ireland, see MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: territorial, political and economic divisions*, 58-87.

• IV

*A Onchú, tócaib do chend... ‘Onchú! Lift your head....’ (§49)*

The next major section of the Life (§47-54) concerns the dealings of Colmán with Onchúmac Saráin of Fir Thulach,<sup>229</sup> and contains a large section of verse which does not reiterate accompanying prose (§49). Previously, Onchú had made Colmán promise that he would be the one to administer the Last Rites to him (§47). When the king later dies, Colmán resuscitates him by pouring water from his bell, the Findfaídech, over his head (§48). The lengthy colloquy then ensues (§49), beginning with Onchú describing his visions of the afterlife and paradise. The king tells Colmán that he has been allowed to return to the land of the living ‘in honour of thee and of Airmedach’. While somewhat formulaic, this response indicates that the Fir Thulach and Lann are in a close relationship. Though the Life is not chronologically consistent, the Airmedach mentioned would appear to be Airmedach Cáech Úa Suibne, son of Conall Guthbinn (†635).<sup>230</sup> The verse immediately turns to the subject of tribute. Colmán requests to know what Onchú will pledge in obedience to him - ‘Shall it be gentle fair service, shall it be bog or land?’ This is information at the heart of this section of the Life, and, indeed, at the core of the Life itself. Throughout the following stanzas Colmán is promised much by way of tribute for Lann such as livestock, food, clothing and raw materials like iron.<sup>231</sup> Warriors, children, women, workmen and servants each have their allotted donation to the settlement. In return, Colmán blesses the island-fort so that it will not be attacked by either foreign or local forces, that it will have good fortune in raids and battles, plentiful harvests and ‘luck of milk and plenteous ale’. While the tribute is detailed, it does not appear overburdensome. That which is promised may well have been an accurate representation of Lann’s claimed dues in the twelfth century. If these claims were largely realistic, then a much clearer view may be provided of the interactions of the community of Lann with local secular powers, and their influential overlords.<sup>232</sup> This colloquy, though specifying modest tribute, closely resembles that of Colum Cille and Scandlán, son of the King of Osraige, in the preface to the *Amra Choluimb Chille*.<sup>233</sup> Here the saint is promised

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<sup>229</sup> Attested in AFM s.a. 660.

<sup>230</sup> AU, AFM.

<sup>231</sup> See MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, 51-52.

<sup>232</sup> For further discussion on this see Chapter 5.1, ‘Lann and Fir Thulach’, and Chapter 5.2, ‘Lann and the Uí Néill’

<sup>233</sup> Stokes, ‘The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille’, 50-55



extensive tribute, including animals and artefacts of gold. In return, the kingdom is blessed, and protection given against Domnall mac Áedo of the southern Uí Néill. It seems likely that the author of *BCh* was well aware of such texts.

Acknowledgement is also made of the presence of other saints in the area, such as Mominóc (Saint Énán). A miraculous spring is mentioned as having been created by Colmán in the area (§50). Additional information introduces politics from the eleventh century during which the author notes that the royal residence of the Fir Thulach had been forcibly seized by Conchubar Úa Máel Sechnaill of the Clann Cholmáin.<sup>234</sup>

The Life continues with further interactions between Colmán and secular and religious figures (§52-70). The majority of meetings with religious figures reflect mutual respect but the relationship with secular rulers is often a more tempestuous affair. Colmán is portrayed as being present, along with his two namesakes, at the famous council of Druim Cett, convened by Colum Cille (§52). It appears that no attempt was made to rationalise the chronology of this convention, dated to the sixth century,<sup>235</sup> with other events depicted in the Life. Instead, the Life appears to proceed by narrative and theme. Thus, Druim Cett merely serves as a well-known event with which to associate Colmán, thereby strengthening his claims to saintly status. A long section (§54-70) of the Life recounts details of the dramatic relationship between Conall Guthbinn and Colmán. It is structurally interesting as the largest single section of continuous narrative in the Life.<sup>236</sup> This section contains the verse which begins ‘*Atciú-sa’ ar an cuimrechaig* ‘I see, said the fettered one’ (§67), in which a prisoner of Conall’s, Maelodrán, praises Colmán’s numerous saintly qualities. This is directly related to the accompanying prose.

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<sup>234</sup> See Chapter 2.3 ‘The date of *BCh* – Internal Evidence’.

<sup>235</sup> The Convention of Druim Cett is recorded in AU s.a. 575. For an account of the historicity of the event, see Ryan, ‘The convention of Druim Ceat (AU 575)’, and Ó Cróinín ‘Ireland, 400 – 800’, 217-218.

<sup>236</sup> The building of a church at Úachtar Comartha (§61), does not seem unrelated to the continuous narrative, nor does the episode concerning Ronat, daughter of Ethgén (§63).

- V

*Masa clérech antí fil ann, dúscid féin dó an ferthigis & dogéna a ásaicc!* ‘If he who is here is a cleric, resuscitate the steward yourselves for him and he shall wash his feet!’ (§71)

Following this lengthy section is Colmán’s visit to the *toídiu* of Moling Luachra and to Áedán of Ferns (§71, 72). As before, the saints Áedán and Colmán, and Moling and Colmán,<sup>237</sup> make a covenant together and exchange the rights of burial in each other’s cemeteries. Incidental information may refer to the ecclesiastical custom of Colmán at Lann. When eating, Colmán says to a server *as amlaid ro clechtusa roind choitcenn am thig: biaid inann cech aenduine déna dunn* ‘Tis thus I have practised a common division in my house: the same food for everyone make thou for us’ (§72). The author moves forward chronologically to the reign of Murchad mac Diarmata (§73, 74),<sup>238</sup> king of Clann Cholmáin, who gives Colmán further land.

- VI

*Ó rángatar tra co Slíab nElpa at-cess dóib annsin múr na Rómæ...* ‘Now when they had gone across the Alps the wall of Rome appeared to them then...’ (§76)

Colmán is next brought into contact with Máel Tuile and Úa Súanaig (§75),<sup>239</sup> and then embarks upon a voyage to Rome with his namesakes, Colmán Comraire and Colman Elo, their arrival in the holy city being likened to their arrival at Druim Cett (§76, 77). This reference further serves to resume the chronology of the Life, which has been left aside in the midst of many tangential sequences. The verse section, beginning *Atlaigmitt do Ríg na rend* ‘We give thanks to the King of stars’ (§76), seems, like the Onchú colloquy (§49), to be related to the accompanying prose, but composed without preface to or reiteration of it. Both of these sections seem independent of the surrounding narrative. It is possible that *Atlaigmitt*

<sup>237</sup> For further information regarding the relationships between these figures in *BCh* see Chapter 4.2 ‘Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours’

<sup>238</sup> Obit given by AU s.a. 715

<sup>239</sup> The obit for Fidmuine Úa Súanaig is recorded by AU s.a. 750 and by AFM s.a. 757. The text of *Do Macuib Úa Suanaigh* ‘The sons of Uí Shúanaigh’ is one of the few places in which Colmán mac Luacháin is mentioned outside of his Life. See Plummer, *BNÉ*, 312-316.

*do Ríg na rend* was composed by the author of the prose at a slightly later date than the rest of the poetry, in order to add detail and authority to the events he is relating. According to Mac Cana, there was a tendency in the eleventh and twelfth centuries ‘to systemize the use of verse in a prose context by making it both more frequent and more regular’.<sup>240</sup> In light of this, the author may have felt that sections of his prose could be profitably enhanced with verse.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, this may be the case in a number of other sections of verse also. The syllabic metre of this verse section, *debide*, may indicate that it was composed at a later period to the remainder of the verse, as the metres contain more flaws than are found in the rest of the Life.<sup>242</sup>

Upon return, Colmán continues his visitations, including a journey to Glasnevin, associated with Mobí (§77-79), and to Finnén of Clonard (§79). From Clonard, Colmán goes to Drong (§81) and back to Lann (§82). The author next relates that Lassar, the mother of Colmán, steals a bag of earth which he had brought back from Rome, bringing it to her family at Tech Lommáin (§82).<sup>243</sup> Perhaps the most interesting of the interactions between Colmán and other saints is the visit of Ciarán of Clonmacnois to Lann (§85).<sup>244</sup> Colmán refuses to acknowledge Ciarán as his superior, citing his allegiance to Mochuta as a major factor.<sup>245</sup> The author cannot attempt to rationalise the event into his chronological timeframe, Ciarán having died a century before the majority of the events in the Life, and certainly prior to the expulsion from Rahan.<sup>246</sup> The episode apparently involves an issue to which the author wishes to draw attention, and it was presumably more effective to have the founder-saints of both

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<sup>240</sup> Mac Cana, ‘Notes on the Combination of Prose and Verse in Early Irish Narrative’, 136.

<sup>241</sup> That the ‘colloquy’ style poems exist outside the norm of praise poetry in *BCh* is in contrast to the later *Acallam na Senórach*. Here, Geraldine Parsons notes, ‘the text’s ‘independent’ poems, namely the lengthy poems which occur outside its dominant question-and-answer exchanges... can be imagined to have existed in contexts other than that of the *Acallam*. See Parsons, ‘*Acallam na Senórach* as Prosimetrum’, 73-85. These colloquy poems in *BCh* represent the exception, which may highlight the role of verse in hagiographic material as being separate from secular literature of roughly the same century period.

<sup>242</sup> *BCh*, 110, notes to 10; 115, notes to 46, 48, 50, 52, 54; 118, notes to 78.

<sup>243</sup> This episode is unusual, though it exhibits similar features to an episode in the Irish Life of Colmán Elo. See Plummer, *BNÉ*, 167, §19.

<sup>244</sup> See Chapter 2.4, ‘The Date of *Betha Cholmáin* – Internal Evidence’.

<sup>245</sup> According to tradition, it was one Crónán mac Loigde, vice-abbot of Clonmacnois, who acted as prime instigator of the expulsion of the Rahan community from Meath. See ‘The Expulsion of Mochuta from Rahan’, in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 298. However in AU s.a. 637, Crónán is given as *abbas Cluan Moccu Nois*, not vice abbot.

<sup>246</sup> Ciarán’s obit is given in AU s.a. 549 and in AFM s.a. 548.

institutions, Clonmacnois and Lann, in the narrative than to introduce an historical, but little known, successor of Ciarán.

The author next recounts the affair of Cináed mac Óengusso, King of the Uí Fhailge, with the wife of the King of Ireland (§86, 87). When threatened with disclosure, Cináed prays to Colmán and the couple, with their aides, are turned into deer and manage to escape.<sup>247</sup> In gratitude for his safeguard, Cináed grants much tribute to Colmán, who in return blesses the Uí Fhailge kingdom. The author relates that Domnall mac Murchadho, king of Tara,<sup>248</sup> grants much land as a bride-price to his wife, who in turn gives it all to Colmán (§89).

The following sequence of events concerns Conall Guthbinn<sup>249</sup> and Áed Róin,<sup>250</sup> is again chronologically inconsistent (§90, 91). However, the historical chronology need not coincide with the narrative sequence. Presumably their inclusion is a further device by which the hagiographer may claim tribute on behalf of Lann.

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<sup>247</sup> Further to this, Cináed's horse is saved from theft when he places it under the safeguard of Colmán, while that of his companion is stolen.

<sup>248</sup> Obit given by AU s.a. 763.

<sup>249</sup> AU s.a. 635.

<sup>250</sup> AU s.a. 604.

### 3.3 The Death of Colmán and Close of the Life (VII-VIII)

*Cía clérech dano rotathbeóraig trí marbu fo chosmailes Críst acht éisium féin?* ‘Again, what cleric resuscitated three dead people in the images of Christ except he?’ (§103)

The final section of the Life begins with the death of Colmán (§96), after which Fursa returns to Lann, where he blesses the community and the church. The Life relates that Fursa ordered the exhumation of Colmán’s remains, and their enshrinement (§97-99). It is possible that the remains of the saint were enshrined in the eighth or ninth century,<sup>251</sup> and hidden during the Viking incursions.<sup>252</sup> Verse attributed to Fursa takes on a slightly different role from that of the remainder of the Life. A poem attributed to him, *Is cett lem don aegaire* ‘I permit the cowherd’ (§99), is considered by Meyer more likely to have been attributed to Colmán in an earlier version of the Life, or in local tradition.<sup>253</sup> However, the internal information does not necessarily suggest that its original speaker was Colmán.<sup>254</sup>

After a final comment (§101, 102) on the role of the three Colmán’s and their assistance in battle, the Life ends with a final flourish by the author in which he describes the many wonders of Colmán, and questions how any other saint could possibly compare. If the Life

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<sup>251</sup> Cf. The relics of the first bishop of Kildare, Conlaed, were placed in a shrine in 800 (AU); the relics of Rónán mac Beraig were placed in a gold and silver shrine, see AU s.a. 801. A Viking raid on Bangor is noted as shaking the relics out of their shrine, where they may have resided for some time beforehand. See AU, AFM s.a.824. Furthermore, a gloss from about 800 refers to Tasach, craftsman of Saint Patrick *toesach dorat cumtach for bachall Ísu* ‘who first put a case on the staff of Jesus’. See Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii, 319.

<sup>252</sup> Compare for instance books locked away during the Viking era which were brought back into use around 980 and following, and made accessible to a contemporary audience. See Herbert, ‘Crossing historical and literary boundaries: Irish written culture around the year 1000’, 90-93.

<sup>253</sup> *BCh*, 120, notes to 98. The verse begins at line 6.

<sup>254</sup> There is also a tradition of Fursa at Lann, with *Cross Fursai*, ‘the Cross of Fursa’, said to be situated on the site (§97). The verse also refers to ‘Lann of pious Colmán’s’. The Colmán’s in question are the three Colmán’s of Meath (Colmán mac Luacháin, Colmán Comraire and Colmán Elo) (§76, 77) of which Colmán Comraire is named as a brother to Fursa. Both are named as sons of Brónach, daughter of Miliuc, captor of Patrick, in the Lists of the mothers of Irish saints in the Book of Leinster. See Ó Riain, *CGSH*, 131, 702.2, 179, 722.92. See also Stokes, *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, 294, note to par. 159-165. It is also known that Fursa also had a connection with Slane, which was not too far from Lann to discount a shared tradition between Fursa and the Colmán’s of Meath. One pedigree for Fursa as abbot of Slane shows him descended from the Conailli Muirthemni. See Ó Riain, *CGSH*, 27, 157.1. For further discussion on this see Charles-Edwards *Early Christian Ireland*, 318, note 177.

was an ambitious undertaking from the outset, seeking to set its subject on a lofty pedestal, it continues this trend to the finish (§103).

### *Summary*

While *BCh* begins by invoking the conventions and expectations of an homiletic Life of the twelfth century, it becomes increasingly concerned with secular matters, especially during its central section. In the latter third of the Life in particular, the author seeks to return his subject to affairs of a religious nature, though this is continually interrupted by secular events such as property transactions. Chronologically, this final section is the most random. The final fifteen or so episodes recounted in the Life might suggest that either the author was unsure of where best to fit his extra material, or he had been made aware of further traditions, the inclusion of which he feels necessary, though some of these episodes are very tenuously linked to the saint, or to Lann.

The present text of *BCh* may be viewed as merging ecclesiastical and secular concerns. We may assume that a framework of accepted and well-known information regarding the saint existed locally. For the intended audience, the property and tribute claims of Lann were added. Political information, both contemporary and historical, was also woven into this framework, serving to broadcast the stance and viewpoints of the saint's community of Lann. Having surveyed the structure and content of the Life, the possibility of a previously existing Life of Colmán seems plausible.<sup>255</sup> The majority of claims to wealth and property appear to be the contribution of the twelfth-century hagiographer, who was clearly tailoring his materials for contemporary purposes.

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<sup>255</sup> Cf. Caoimhín Breatnach's work on the structure of *Immram Curaig Úa Corra*. In this he analyses the role of verse and prose, positing that an exemplar of the twelfth century is most likely. See Breatnach, 'Immram Curaig Úa Corra', 91-107, especially at pages 99-105

### 3.4 Verse in *BCh*

*Ní tæť raindi breth mo raind-si...* 'The judgement of my verse does not come against us...' (§65)

Twenty-five separate sections of verse are included in *BCh*. These range from single quatrains to versified colloquies of more than a hundred lines. By investigating the function, form and language of these verses, a more complete picture can be painted both of the author who composed them and the community in which he was working. There will also be investigation of whether verse and prose were composed largely at the same time, or whether one predated the other in any meaningful fashion. We have seen previously (Chapter 2.3 and 2.4) that it is unlikely that the text was composed earlier than the middle of the eleventh century or later than the middle of the twelfth century. On the whole, the verse does not exhibit qualities which would make it significantly earlier than the prose, or a relic of an earlier poetic tradition of the saint. Linguistic evidence indicates a much higher percentage of infixed pronouns in verse than in the prose passages, a ratio of about 2:1. However these infixed pronouns are generally pleonastic in nature.<sup>256</sup>

While the use of infixed pronouns may suggest an early date, other features in the quatrains do not support this, and are indicative of an eleventh- or twelfth-century period of composition. For instance, we find numerous unverbated forms in many verse sections, together with independent object pronouns, later nominal declensions and numerous other features which generally indate a Middle Irish period of composition. However, imperfections in the metrical scheme of some of these poetic sections may also suggest the addition of later sections of verse to what may be slightly older originals.<sup>257</sup>

It is unlikely that verbal forms in the verse could readily be subject to scribal change, given metrical constraints. Changes would require much effort on the part of the redactor. It is to be noted that examples of later negatives and contracted verbal forms do not disrupt the syllable

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<sup>256</sup> See Chapter 2.4 for a discussion the linguistic features of some sections of verse.

<sup>257</sup> See, for instance, the discussion on §10 in Chapter 2.4 above.

count of much of the verse<sup>258</sup>. It is therefore unlikely that the bulk of the verse in the Life significantly predates the language of the prose. In the case of *Cethrí fichit sé fir déc* ‘Ninety-six Men’ (§19) Meyer points out that the use of *déc* (20.5-6) and *úa* (*túalaing* 20.10) as monosyllables suggest that this poem at least cannot be earlier than the second half of the tenth century.<sup>259</sup> The poem is attributed to Mochuta upon his expulsion from Rahan and the midlands by Blathmac. While far later than the date of the actual expulsion,<sup>260</sup> its connection with the traditions of Mochuta, rather than those of Colmán, suggests that it may not have been composed by the author of *BCh*, but rather was chosen from pre-existing work because of its perceived connection with the current subject matter. This evidence may infer that the verse and prose are not always intrinsically related. The verse is, in the majority of cases, linguistically compatible with the prose, but variations in context and content suggests that it may not always have had a shared heritage in traditions associated with Colmán mac Luacháin. The Mochuta example is clearly borrowed from material associated with Rahan or Lismore. Other sections of verse, however, though they mention, or are attributed to, Colmán, may in fact belong to the tradition of another figure with the same name. Prime candidates for such ‘borrowing’ of material are Colmán Elo and Colmán Comraire, mentioned numerous times in *BCh* (§31, 33, 42, 76 etc).

The following table provides the location and metres of each of the verse sections in the Life. Verses are noted by their paragraph number (§X) unless a specific line number is required for greater accuracy. Line numbers will be referenced in the format (page.line). Metrical information is taken from Meyer’s notes to the Life and reference to Gerard Murphy’s *Early Irish Metrics*, together with my own analysis and supplemental relevant additional scholarship.<sup>261</sup> Many metrical forms are utilised in the Life, as can be seen from the following table. Forms of *debide* and *rannaigeacht* are most common, though the author introduces a number of variants. The verse does not always fully adhere to the rules of the metres. The

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<sup>258</sup> E.g.: *tuilltir* ‘will be earned’ (<*do-slí*) is dysyllabic, fitting the *rannaigeacht bec bec* quatrain ‘*óen can cetta / maith da muintir / dochum péne / ní rís tuilltir*’ (30.3-4) perfectly. Similarly, *nocha* fits the *leth-rannaigeacht mór* quatrain ‘*nocha faigbe bás gurbat senior crín / raga ar neim iar tain / bidh hé sin do díl*’ (36.23-4).

<sup>259</sup> *BCh*, 112, note to 20.

<sup>260</sup> AU s.a. 636.

<sup>261</sup> Meyer, *A Primer of Irish Metrics*; Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* and *Early Irish Metrics*, and Murphy and Knott, ‘Irish Classical Poetry’, 21-93.



syllable count may be incorrect, for example, or a necessary disyllable may be found in place of a monosyllable, and vice-versa.

*Fig. 7 – The verse in BCh*

Paragraph No.	Metrical Form	Metre	First Line
11	rannaigecht chummaisc	1 <sup>st</sup> half of 1 <sup>st</sup> stanza: 2(6 <sup>3</sup> ) Middle: 2[2(7 <sup>3</sup> ) + 5 <sup>1</sup> ] 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of last two stanzas: 3(7 <sup>3</sup> )	<i>Amra gein gignither</i>
14	leth-rannaigecht mór	2(5 <sup>1</sup> + 5 <sup>1</sup> )	<i>Mo mac, inmain hé</i>
19	1 <sup>st</sup> half of 1 <sup>st</sup> couplet: debide guilbnech 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of 1 <sup>st</sup> couplet: debide 2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza: debide n-imrinn Final stanza: debide guilbnech and debide	2(7 <sup>1</sup> + 7 <sup>2</sup> ) with variants	<i>Cethri fichit sé fir déc</i>
22	rannaigecht bec bec	2(4 <sup>2</sup> + 4 <sup>2</sup> )	<i>Colmán lámglan, lór a gile</i>
25	cró commaisc eter casbairdne ocus leth-rannaigecht	2(7 <sup>3</sup> + 5 <sup>1</sup> )	<i>A Dúngail óicc feramail</i>
30	rannaigecht bec bec	2(4 <sup>2</sup> + 4 <sup>2</sup> )	<i>Colmán Lainde, flatha fine</i>
32	áe fhreslige for dechnaid	2(6 <sup>3</sup> + 5 <sup>2</sup> )	<i>Do Chríst atlochar-sa</i>
34	leth-rannaigecht mór	2(5 <sup>1</sup> + 5 <sup>1</sup> )	<i>Inmuin tríar táet and</i>
38	leth-rannaigecht mór	2(5 <sup>1</sup> + 5 <sup>1</sup> )	<i>Fearr fer andát fir</i>
47	áe fhreslige	2(7 <sup>3</sup> + 7 <sup>2</sup> )	<i>Biaid mac amra acat-sa</i>

<b>49</b>	debide (imperfect)	$2(7^1 + 7^2)$	<i>A Onchú, tócaib do chend</i>
<b>51</b>	rannaigeacht chetharchubaid garit recomarcach	$3^2, 7^2, 7^2, 7^2$	<i>Mo cháoirig...</i>
<b>65</b>	rannaigeacht bec bec	$2(4^2 + 4^2)$	<i>Fland mac Ónchon, dam-sa is cara</i>
<b>67</b>	cró cummaisc eter casbairdne ocus leth-rannaigeacht	$2(7^3 + 5^1)$	<i>'Atciú-sa' ar an cuimrechaig</i>
<b>72</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> line: rannaigeacht diúltach 2 <sup>nd</sup> line: debide 2 <sup>nd</sup> quatrain: cró cummaisc eter casbairdne oculus leth- rannaigeacht	1 <sup>st</sup> line: $(7^1 + 7^1)$ 2 <sup>nd</sup> line: $(7^1 + 7^2)$ 2 <sup>nd</sup> quatrain: $2(7^3 + 5^1)$	<i>Fer trí funa, fer trí scó</i>
<b>75</b>	debide guilbnech	No set syllable count	<i>'Fácbaím' ar Fidmuine find</i>
<b>76</b>	debide (imperfect)	$2(7^1 + 7^2)$	<i>Atlaigmitt do Ríg na rend</i>
<b>78</b>	debide	$2(7^1 + 7^2)$ except the 1 <sup>st</sup> half of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> stanzas	<i>Mochin gustánig na tech</i>
<b>80</b>	snédbairdne rumainn	$4^2, 8^2, 4^2, 8^2$	<i>Baetán breatan, bél co mbrethaib</i>
<b>88</b>	debide	$2(7^1 + 7^2)$ the second line of the final stanza contains 8 syllables	<i>Searc tug ben Ríg tailtenn trell</i>
<b>94</b>	cró cummaisc eter casbairdne ocus leth-rannaigeacht  last stanza is rannaigeacht diúltach	$2(7^3 + 5^1)$  Final stanza: $2(7^1 + 7^1)$	<i>Sele Colmáin meic Lúacháin</i>

<b>97</b>	áe fhreslige	$2(7^3 + 7^2)$	<i>Dá chomurtha súaichinti</i>
<b>99</b>	áe fhreslige	$2(7^3 + 7^2)$	<i>Is cett lem don aegaire</i>
<b>100</b>	rannaigeacht diúltach	$2(7^1 + 7^1)$	<i>Fir timna céin bett abus</i>
<b>102</b>	debide and rannaigeacht diúltach	$2(7^1 + 7^2)$ and $2(7^1 + 7^1)$	<i>Cach olc do muir is do thír</i>

### 3.5 The Medium of *BCh*, its Performance, and Reception

*Ailmitt trócaire na trínóiti ule 7 rl...* ‘We all beseech the mercy of the Trinity  
etc...’ (§2)

Great care was taken in the composition of *BCh* and other works of hagiographic literature. Indeed, all medieval written material necessitated an intelligent, careful and meticulous approach, given the time, effort and expense it took to produce. While not all literary material was a paradigm of perfection, the effort expended often rendered the physical material into a work of art in its own right, content aside. However, it is the content of the material that allows an audience to engage with it, to understand it. It is difficult to imagine that the vehicle most likely to convey the information and meaning required would be the written word in a context in which such a large percentage of the Irish populous were illiterate. The monastic *literati* were unlikely to have spent so much time and effort solely in their own interest. It follows that, to convey the informative content and views of the written text, other media were also utilised. Oral tradition has long been integral to Irish society. History, law, poetry and sagas were preserved orally from the earliest times through to the era of manuscript production. Doubtless the spread of literacy allowed for greater access to, and production of, written material, but for a majority of the populace, written content remained inaccessible. Thus this content needed to be conveyed orally.

*BCh* contains much information directed at various audiences through its verse and prose. The verse which begins *A Onchú, tócaib do chend* ‘Onchú, lift thy head’ (§49), discussed previously, relays much information to the populace and rulers of Fir Thulach regarding the wealth and tribute that the monastic institution at Lann felt it was due. Prose passages throughout the Life describe in detail the lands and churches over which Lann sought to lay claim (§26, 27, 39, 43, 61, 62 etc). Numerous sections of verse remind the audience of the saint’s claim to holiness, as outlined previously (§14, 30, 67), while prose (§3-5) and verse (§30, 34, 78) reiterate his claim to secular nobility. It is likely that, given such a wide ranging audience, there would have been resort to oral transmission of at least parts of the Life, in order to convey the necessary information to its target audience. Sioned Davies has noted of

Welsh material that ‘it was composed with a vocalised performance in mind. Of course most medieval literature was written ultimately to be *heard*’.<sup>262</sup> This is not in doubt in the case of *BCh*. Rather the question must be *how* it was designed to be heard.

*BCh* is composed with a homiletic introduction and conclusion (§1, 104), though this format by no means allows it to be categorised as a true homily. Brian Murdoch has written that ‘Saints’ Lives themselves are close to the thematic sermon in that they are more or less by definition *exempla* for good behaviour, albeit a saint’s *vita* is sometimes more *admiranda* than *imitanda*’.<sup>263</sup> Is this applicable to *BCh*? Sections of the Life, including the verses praising the saint’s piety may certainly be considered *admiranda*, though the text as a whole is far too long and too concerned with the acquisition of wealth and property to be considered a convincing sermon, much less one containing many ‘*exempla* for good behaviour’. Even so, sermons given at the church at Lann may have drawn upon elements in the Life of its patron in order to convey a particular message. Previous to the composition or compilation of the Life, clerics must have drawn on traditional anecdotal information concerning the saint in their preaching. This matter needs further scrutiny.

Conventional use of an homiletic element found towards the end of *BCh* is similar to that found in the Irish Life of Colum Cille.<sup>264</sup> It presents Colmán as a pious and humble individual, the author stating that *ní coimsidh nech dechmad an neich dorigne-sim do aisnéis acht mane tísad a aingel comaidechta nó spiratt a anma féin ana churp doridhisi dia falsiugud* ‘No one can relate a tithe of what he did unless his guardian-angel should come or the spirit of his own soul should come back again into his body to make it known’ (§104). Compare this with the Life of Colum Cille, which says *Is lía tra tuirem ocus aisneis a ndorigne Dia do fertaib ocus mirbuli isna talmandaib for Colum Cille ar ni fil nech con-icfe a tuirim co léir, acht mine tissad a aingel fen nó aingel Dé nime dia n-aisneis, conid lór dún so do thabairt dib for desmbirecht* ‘Beyond reckoning and relating are the wonders and miracles which God performed on earth for Colum Cille, for there is no-one able to enumerate them

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<sup>262</sup> Davies, ‘Performing Culhwch ac Olwen’, 29.

<sup>263</sup> Murdoch, ‘Preaching in medieval Ireland: the Irish tradition’, 41.

<sup>264</sup> ‘Betha Choluim Cille’ in Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 218-270.

all, unless his own angel or an angel of God from heaven should come to narrate them'.<sup>265</sup> The author may well have been familiar with the Life of Colum Cille, from which he drew inspiration.

The composition of the Life is such that it suggests an attempt to include all the traditions of the saint known to the author and his community at the time. Rather than attempting to create a linear biography, thematic tangents are followed. At the beginning of the Life, Colmán is born and baptised by Bishop Etchén (§10, 11), and a story about the miraculous powers of the boy follows (§12). The linear narrative next describes Etchén sending the boy to Saint Mochuta at Rahan (§20). In between, however, are recorded the childhood miracles of Colmán, many of the episodes of which begin with the formulaic *araile scél forathmentur sund* 'another story is recorded here' (§15, 16, 17), which suggests the author is including each tradition concerning the childhood of the saint available to him as the subject arises. This compositional method is observable throughout the Life.<sup>266</sup> It is possible that the Life was flexible in its transmission to an audience, with particular areas highlighted when appropriate to the occasion and the audience intended. Thus the Life need not be seen solely as a text to be preached in its entirety as a sermon on the feast day of the saint, but perhaps also as a number of potential sermons which could be rearranged and utilised to convey particular messages to their intended audiences. That these messages were conveyed at Lann is certain. Throughout *BCh* we have constant references to *sund* and *i fus* 'here', i.e. at or near Lann, (24.29, 26.18, 76.19).

*Sermo ad Reges* 'Sermon to Kings', in the *Leabhar Breac* is an example of a homily which instructs its intended audience on good and just rulership, its benefits, and consequences of its neglect.<sup>267</sup> Could not an abbot or lector have performed a version of such a sermon from Lann's point of view? Material is present in the Life concerning the local Fir Thulach kings

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* 240 §63, translated on 263.

<sup>266</sup> For instance, when Colmán is gifted the land upon which to build his church at Lann (§39), the author describes a number of episodes about one of its craftsmen, Anniaraid (§40, 41), before describing the foundation of the site (§42).

<sup>267</sup> See Atkinson, *The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac*, 151-62, translated at 401-413. This text is also being considered in an ongoing fashion by Dr. Brent Miles, with publication work being prepared for the near future.

(§47 – 51) and the saint's interactions with them. The saint offers protection of Fir Thulach lands, goods and populace when the king, Onchú, promises wealth and tribute. The Uí Néill overlords are also viewed favourably when their king, Conall Guthbinn, allocates property to Colmán and Lann (§59, 62). This favour is replaced by wrath when the same king transgresses against the saint (§65, 66, 68), leading to the cursing of Conall's descendants and his own death (§69). The curse is lifted when the grandson of Conall makes peace by granting further property to the saint (§73). The message is clear: rulers who pay homage and donate wealth to Lann are viewed favourably, while those who transgress against the institution must suffer the consequences. In the cases above, verse is interwoven with prose to expound the views of Lann. This verse is presented as the first person speech of Colmán and Maelodrán respectively (§67, 65).

The performance of such excerpts from the Life may now be considered. While not theatre, the recitation of sections of the Life of a saint, especially versified sections, must have had an element of performance in order to hold the attention of the audience, and to better emphasise the message being conveyed. Of medieval texts, it has been noted that 'their actual enactment was necessarily a vital part of their impact... the audience would see as well as hear the reader, so that kinesic elements such as gestures and facial expressions would continue to play an important part'.<sup>268</sup> The later-medieval, or early-modern, period saw the formal training of preachers of sermons in gesture and intonation.<sup>269</sup> Though this formal training was introduced, largely by the Franciscans,<sup>270</sup> some centuries later than the composition of the *BCh*, it is not unrealistic to suppose that some methods of performance were utilised in the twelfth century, given the increasing collaboration between professionally trained *filid* and monastic *literati*, as outlined above.<sup>271</sup> Of satire, Alan Fletcher notes that 'its delivery might often have been something of a performance, a more highly wrought and energetic affair than mere recitation'.<sup>272</sup> While there may be moments of humour in *BCh*, it is certainly not satire. Nevertheless, a word of warning to the royal lineage of Uí Fáilge is included (§87): that any king of the Uí Fáilgi would 'decay or die early' lest the tribute be paid to Lann, as agreed

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<sup>268</sup> Davies, 'Written text as performance: the implications for Middle Welsh prose narratives', 135.

<sup>269</sup> Fletcher and Gillespie, *Irish Preaching 700 – 1700*, introd. 14.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> Mac Cana, 'Notes on the combination of prose and verse in early Irish narrative', 138.

<sup>272</sup> Fletcher, *Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland*, 25.

upon by their ancestor, Cinaed. This may have been taken more seriously were some ceremonial pomp and flourish utilised in the recitation of that section of the Life.

Stock gestures are difficult to comment upon, given the lack of evidence. However, *BCh* does indicate that some stock phraseology was utilised. *Araile scél sund, araile scél forathmentur sund*, ‘another tale here, another tale is recorded here’ as a formulaic opening for episodes, and *do Día is do Colmán co bráth, is saer hí / hé ar chíss rí g oculus flatha* ‘to God and to Colman until doom, it is free from tax of king or lord’ as closing formulae of a grant, are used in multiple instances throughout the Life. Of the Irish *Sex Aetates Mundi*, Herbert has noted the possibility that one recension of it may have been ‘adapted for instructional purposes, since several of its interventions are framed in a catechetical manner’.<sup>273</sup> The importance of maintaining an audience’s attention by utilising such performance methods cannot be over-emphasised, as ‘the mediaeval listeners could not glance back a few pages if they lost track of the story for a moment’.<sup>274</sup> Thus the performance becomes a social and cultural process. As Davies notes:

‘a special way of communicating which uses special aesthetic techniques together with various signs to key performance... compare the use of phrases such as ‘Once upon a time’, ‘Let us pray’ – the traditional audience knows what to expect, what type of performance, and recognizes the generic rules of that performance’.<sup>275</sup>

While speaking largely of eighteenth-century preaching in Wales, Davies notes that the roots of such preaching must lie in the Middle Ages, where later preachers can be seen as a continuation of the medieval *cyfarwydd* ‘storyteller’.<sup>276</sup> Such practices have been outlined in medieval England by G.R. Owst, who notes a growth in realism in sermons from the thirteenth century onwards. Owst describes that sermons began to include far more examples of everyday life, and objects found in it, from around this period, most likely to allow for a greater understanding on the part of the audience, in turn providing a willingness to accept

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<sup>273</sup> Herbert, ‘The Irish “*Sex Aetates Mundi*”’, 109.

<sup>274</sup> Crosby, ‘Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages’, 107.

<sup>275</sup> Davies, ‘Performing from the Pulpit’, 118.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.* 120-121.



the message of the sermon.<sup>277</sup> While speaking of the thirteenth century, it is not difficult to imagine that these practices had been developing previously. It is also likely that similar occurrences were taking place in Ireland during this period. In numerous instances in *BCh*, the hagiographer demonstrates that traces of the patron saint are to be found throughout the locality.<sup>278</sup> The historicity of these traces is not in question for the audience. Rather, the message reinforces the presence of the saint in the locality of the listeners. The hagiographer's detailed knowledge of the locality increased the impact of his message on his intended audience.

Involvement of the audience is an essential part of any performance, theatrical or otherwise. The nature of the involvement may be passive or active. Passive involvement necessitates that a feeling of belonging to the performance must be nurtured. The audience must be rapt, absorbed, and in agreement with the material of the performance. Active participation must directly involve the audience in a physical way, most usually verbal, as is the case with responsorial psalms or the singing of hymns. The portrayal of a secular figure in an unfavourable light must convince the audience that the figure was, indeed, unfavourable. Propaganda tactics are employed to demonstrate the moral superiority of the speaker and the institution for which he spoke. The threat that a local king might 'decay or die early' unless tribute was paid to Lann must convince the audience that this was more than rhetoric. It is difficult to do more than speculate on the nature of passive participation in the delivery of *BCh*, or sections thereof. There may, however, be some evidence of a type of active audience participation. An indication that the homiletic preface was meant to be read aloud or involve an audience in some way may be seen in the phrase *ailmitt trócaire na trínóide ule 7 rl* 'let us all beseech the mercy of the Trinity etc.' (§2). Here the use of the first plural 'us', and the 'etc', indicates that the invocation is standard, but the use of *ule* 'all' may suggest a point at which a congregation would speak the words together.

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<sup>277</sup> Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 23-24.

<sup>278</sup> E.g. Colmán's well (§50), Colmán's cave (§45), the mark of the saint's bell (§61), Colmán's oak (§81) etc.

*BCh* also includes some seventeen statements towards the end of the text (§103), each of which seek to exemplify Colmán as a figure far beyond the limits of any other saint in the land. E.g.:

*Follus tra asna scélaib-so Colmáin meic Luacháin nách fil clérech is amru ac Día oldás-[s]om. Ar cíá clérech ele a nÉrinn ro-imthig an loch cen eathar acht éisium?... Cíá clérech cus'tánige Críst féin hi richt claim ic Crois Clamán acht chuigci-sim namá?... Cíá clérech dano robáid indsi cona daeinib fo loch acht éisim ana aena béoss?*

“Now it is evident from these stories about Colman, son of Luachán, that God thinks no cleric more wonderful than him. For what other cleric in Ireland has gone on a lake without a boat but he ... What cleric again is there to whom Christ came in the shape of a leper at Cross Clamán except he only? ... What cleric swamped an island and its inhabitants under a lake but, again, he alone?”

These represent a selection of such questions. They each serve a different purpose, ranging from the outright claim of Colmán’s superiority in the first question, to the subtle mention of Cross Clamán, a local feature at Lann in the second.<sup>279</sup> This is a clever method of blending local traditions with a wider survey. Indeed, which other saint would have had Christ appear to him at a landmark so specific to Lann and its community? It is possible that the list of questions was not entirely rhetorical, and this, in turn, provides the possibility of active audience participation in the preaching, or performance. It is not difficult to imagine, at the end of the performance of sections of the Life, that a review may have been necessary in order to ensure the full effect of the intended message. To this end the series of questions may have been posed to the audience, and they, in turn, may have responded, in a way not unlike a responsorial psalm, that indeed Colmán was the only cleric to have achieved this or that feat.

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<sup>279</sup> It is noteworthy that it is referred to as Cross Clamán here, not Cross Cholmáin. This suggests either that the place-name had changed even by the twelfth-century composition of the Life, or that, locally, Colmán and Clamán were interchangeable. Pól Breatnach identified this as a pronunciation still in use in the nineteenth century in ‘The Shrine of Colmán of Lynn’, 201.

In the text of *BCh*, formulaic prayers, usually a single quatrain, are also introduced, probably to assist in the Life's instruction of the laity. Prayers to keep sheep safe (§51),<sup>280</sup> to promote good health (§94) and to defend fortresses (§102) are included in the Life, and may have formed part of local tradition. The *Leabhar Breac* homily on Saint Patrick ends with just such a prayer invoking the saint for general protection.<sup>281</sup> The Tripartite Life of Patrick seems to have been re-fashioned as a homily in the eleventh century.<sup>282</sup> Versified elements of *BCh* and a performance of, or sermon-like approach to, their content is also reflective of roughly contemporary practices in Germany. Murdoch notes that

‘there is a German poem from about 1150 ... which gives the story of St. Martin and also expounds the gospel pericope of Zacchaeus the tax collector... it was clearly read out to an aristocratic, secular, married and most importantly *moneyed* audience, telling them that in spite of Matthew 19:24, the rich could indeed enter the kingdom of heaven, provided they gave alms’.<sup>283</sup>

While Murdoch's example cannot strictly be called a sermon, neither can a performance of sections of *BCh*, as direct biblical references do not occur often in the verse of the Life. It is likely that the content of the Life was aimed at all strata of society, rather than simply the ‘aristocratic, secular’, though these are certainly prominent in the implied audience. Regardless of social stratum, one message is reiterated to the Life's public; that through payment of tribute or alms, the saint's favour - and heaven itself - could be attained. Lann certainly provided good odds for those lucky enough to be buried at the cemetery, for which it is claimed that a mere one out of every hundred interred would fail to enter the kingdom of heaven (§11, 29).

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<sup>280</sup> By using this prayer to keep the sheep of Ireland safe, *BCh* claims that Colman is entitled to a ewe lamb from every flock. It has been suggested that the principal form of tribute to a smaller monastic institution was livestock. See MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, 51-52. However, compare (§49), in which the tributes due from the Fir Thulach to Lann are detailed minutely. Horses are mentioned here, but no other animals seem to form part of this tribute.

<sup>281</sup> Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick* ii, 488.

<sup>282</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 195.

<sup>283</sup> Murdoch, ‘Preaching in Medieval Ireland: The Irish Tradition’, 42.

The use of single quatrain formulaic prayers begs inquiry as to the use of other versified sections of the Life in the same manner. Is it possible that some of the verses could have been used liturgically? The preface to the *Amra Choluimb Chille* contains a number of such single-quatrain religious expressions.<sup>284</sup> The varied use of metrical forms throughout the Life may suggest that the poetry fulfilled varying roles. In addition to acting as a reiteration, or substitution, of the prose in a performance of the Life, they may have served as a method for a public to interact in a more direct manner with their local patron saint. The single-quatrain prayers for protection are an example of this. Some of the longer poems in the Life contain features which may suggest that they are remnants of a liturgy, spoken or sung by the audience as part of a mass or church service at Lann. The verse beginning *Amra gein gignithir* ‘A wonderful birth will be born’ (§11) exhibits the Old-Irish third relative reduplicated future of *gainither* ‘to be born’. This is found alongside forms more typical of Middle-Irish such as the *f*-future *genfid* (6.21, 14.11). It is tempting to suggest that the verse here may be older than its surrounding prose, but in general this is likely not the case.<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, the older verbal form may suggest that this verse, or perhaps sections of it, were in existence somewhat previous to the composition of the Life. The content of the verse, praising the saint greatly, would lend itself well to being sung or recited as part of a liturgy or hymn. It is highly repetitive and alliterative for the first half,<sup>286</sup> which seems to contain less of the Middle-Irish features, making it simple to memorise for an illiterate audience. In the verse beginning *Colmán Lainde, flatha fine* ‘Colmán of Lann, chief of a tribe’ (§30), similar qualities are exhibited. It is a verse section in praise of Colmán with no evident ulterior motive.<sup>287</sup> Evidence is lacking to say with any certainty whether such verse sections, included in a written Life, may once have been sung as hymns, but the possibility is intriguing.

<sup>284</sup> Stokes, ‘The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille’, 148-156.

<sup>285</sup> See Chapter 3.4 ‘Verse in BCh’ and a specific discussion of the language of this poem in Chapter 2.4

<sup>286</sup> *Bid crabdech, bid caeinsuárach / bid cendais, bid conderclech / bid credal cáid caid / bid lía lógmar lainnerda / lan do grad na Trínóiti / eter feóil is cnáim* (12.1-5).

<sup>287</sup> C.f. the hymns praising Patrick, Brigit and Colum Cille in Bernard and Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, 160-162.

## Conclusion

On the whole, verse and prose in the Life are utilised in a flexible manner. As discussed above, less than a quarter of the versified sections seek to claim property directly. Rather, verse provides a change of medium, usually serving to elevate the moral character of the saint though positioned before, or after, a prose section which often *does* make some financial claim. Thus, the authority of the saint is strengthened in the minds of the receptive audience. It has been noted by Robin Chapman Stacey that by its nature law must be performed.<sup>288</sup> A performance was used to sway the audience to a particular way of thinking, a method of persuasion still in use in modern courts. Like legal persuasion, the use of intermittent verse served to imprint the character of the saint in the minds of the audience, thus the sections of prose dealing with more secular matters could be pronounced with authority as proof of the historical justification of what has been claimed. Structuring the varied content of the lengthy text which survives to us would have required skill and planning. It is unlikely that an oral narrative existed in comparable form and detail previous to the composition of the Life. The author does not merely string episodes together, adding some verse for good measure; he recalibrates the traditions into something altogether immediate for his audience. Such a hagiographical work may, perhaps, therefore be classed among the corpus of ‘oral-derived texts rather than unambiguously oral texts’,<sup>289</sup> in Davies’ terms. In the Welsh context, she notes that ‘those traits that are usually described as ‘oral’ should not be regarded merely as a residue of the oral past, but as functional within a literate context’.<sup>290</sup> Less study has been carried out on the Irish material, and less again on the hagiographic texts, but it is logical that at least some of the methods of performance and reception being employed by medieval Welsh *literati* would also have been utilised in Ireland, in a complementary but not identical fashion to the performance of law. The verse of *BCh*, in this context, becomes a vibrant and immediate part of the text. While some may be borrowed (§19), and some may be later additions to the text,<sup>291</sup> all the versified elements exist in the text with purpose, subtly enhancing it both as a literary creation and as a vehicle by which Lann conveyed its ideas, and projected relationships with surrounding secular and ecclesiastical communities.

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<sup>288</sup> Chapman-Stacey, *Dark Speech, the Performance of Law in Early Ireland*, 93.

<sup>289</sup> Davies, ‘Written text as performance’, 135.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>291</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3.

## Section 2 : Concerns of Lann in *BCh*

### *Section Preface*

#### Lann and the Twelfth-Century Ecclesiastical Reforms

The following chapters make reference to the ecclesiastical reform movement of the twelfth century. These reforms had great impact upon churches, both large and small, across the country. The seismic shift in thinking and practice would have been keenly felt at a small institution such as Lann, and this is certainly reflected in its hagiographical literature. A small church community in the midlands, caught between political factions of church and state, north and south, east and west. If we assume that *BCh* was compiled sometime in the first quarter of the twelfth century, this locates it in the middle of the political maelstrom, the effects of which cannot be underestimated on a small, quite vulnerable community. Wealthier and more influential church foundations vied for ever-increasing political influence, while patronage by secular rulers was becoming an increasingly sought-after commodity. It is useful to investigate the background to these reforms, their genesis, development and turning points in order to paint a picture of the broader situation in which Lann found itself. Part of the investigation will focus on whether the reaction of the community at Lann to the reform movement can be gauged through the Life of its patron. Did the community agree or disagree with changing practices, and what may have influenced such a stance? It is hoped that this background information may illuminate further the discussions which follow, setting in context the reasons for Lann's supposed obsession with tithes and property as well as its political vulnerability.

The reforms began on the Continent in the tenth century, followed by an acceleration of the reformist movement throughout the eleventh century.<sup>292</sup> Increasingly, the Benedictine and Cistercian orders were becoming discomfited by practices which they viewed as un-

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<sup>292</sup> For an overview of the beginnings of Continental Church reform in the tenth and eleventh centuries, see Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 1-7 and Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 253-256.

Christian: simony, the selling of indulgences, the marriage of clerics and taxation of local land-owners to name but a few of the more important issues. Influential figures such as the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux gave voice to these concerns and instigated a series of reformist initiatives designed to bring Continental churches back to a more spiritual and austere way of life. The Benedictine community of Cluny, in East-Central France, and home to Bernard, was one of the driving forces behind these initiatives.<sup>293</sup> These reforms spread across Western Europe, to Britain, from whence, in time, they came to Ireland. However, it was not only from Britain that reform came, but it was also driven by the ideals of Irish clerics living and studying on the continent: Fingén, Fulda, Marianus<sup>294</sup> and, perhaps most famously, Máel Maedhóg Úa Morgair, more commonly known as Malachy (†1148).<sup>295</sup>

The most influential figures in Britain regarding the spread of these reforms to Ireland were undoubtedly Lanfranc (†1089),<sup>296</sup> and his successor, Anshelm (†1109),<sup>297</sup> who between them held the office of Archbishop of Canterbury from 1070-1109.<sup>298</sup> These two figures were deeply concerned with the Irish church and its organisation, and the supposed abuses therein. Both figures consecrated Bishops of Dublin<sup>299</sup> and therefore would have been intimately aware of the state of the Irish Church, at the very least from an Hiberno-Norse perspective. Correspondence was sent back and forth between the two bishops and various regal figures, with what appears to have been some frequency. Most notably, Lanfranc wrote to Toirdelbach Úa Briain, King of Munster, in 1074,<sup>300</sup> while Anshelm wrote to Toirdelbach's second son and successor, Muirchertach Úa Briain, c. 1094.<sup>301</sup> Lanfranc wrote to the Munster king not only from personal interest, but also with the authority of Pope Gregory VII, who

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<sup>293</sup> For an overview of Cluny's involvement in the reform movement, see Smith, *Cluny in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1930).

<sup>294</sup> Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 254-255. For a more detailed description of Irish monks and the Cluniac reform see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 1-16.

<sup>295</sup> Death recorded in ATig, AFM, MIA.

<sup>296</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* 1. For an overview on the involvement of Lanfranc and the Irish Church, see Gwynn, 68-83.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.* For an overview of the involvement of Anshelm with the Irish Church, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 99-115.

<sup>298</sup> Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 253. For a general discussion see M. Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective on Church Reform and Ireland, 1070-1115', 13-35.

<sup>299</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 75-76, 99 and 102.

<sup>300</sup> Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 5.

<sup>301</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 104.

himself took an active interest in Irish affairs, though there is no direct mention of the Holy See in Lanfranc's letters.<sup>302</sup> Lanfranc's tone is chiding, and he outlines his main issues regarding irregularities of conduct within the Irish Church as follows: defective marriage law and sexual ethics; maladministration of the sacraments (mainly acceptance of payment for such); the consecration of too many bishops and simony.<sup>303</sup> He urges the king to address these issues, suggesting reform, and indeed Toirdelbach assembles a council at Dublin in 1084 some ten years later, though, as Watt notes, there is little surviving information about it, and it is therefore uncertain whether this came about in part due to the influence of Lanfranc.<sup>304</sup>

The letters of Anshelm are largely copies of the sentiments expressed by his predecessor some two decades earlier and clearly lament the fact that previous advice and warnings had not been heeded, particularly in relation to marriage customs and the consecration of too many bishops.<sup>305</sup> However, the letters are written in far more forceful language, and not only to Muirchertach, styled as King of Ireland, but, in the case of Anshelm's second letter, to his brother Diarmaid also.<sup>306</sup> It seems to have had the desired effect, as a reply from Muirchertach suggests that it affected him deeply and left him quite repentant.<sup>307</sup> It is

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<sup>302</sup> Lanfranc, himself Italian, had been in constant contact with Gregory during his early years at Canterbury and had Pope Alexander II as one of his pupils during his time as Bishop of Lombardy. It is very likely that there was contact between Lanfranc and Gregory regarding the Irish church and his admonishment of Toirdelbach. See Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 88-89 and Dumville *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, 40-41. For a more general discussion on the significant role that Gregory played in the early days of Irish church reform, see Gwynn, 'Gregory VII and the Irish church', *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 84-98.

<sup>303</sup> See Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 6-7.

<sup>304</sup> Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 7.

<sup>305</sup> Flanagan notes that, by the twelfth century, Irish marriage customs contravened canon law in three ways. Of the reform movement, she states: 'Marriage was seen as the distinctive feature of the lay order and concern for its correct observance proceeded in parallel with the definition of the duties of the clergy'. See Flanagan, *Transformation of The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 184.

<sup>306</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 104-105. For a general discussion on the figure of Muirchertach during this period, see Duffy, 'The Western World's Tower of Honour and Dignity', the Career of Muirchertach Ua Briain in Context', 56-73 and Dumville, *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, 42-43.

<sup>307</sup> Muirchertach's letter refers to his 'blind ignorance' and that the conduct of his kingdom has been lacking. He notes that he wishes to reform and begs that Malchus, a priest trained fully in reformist methodologies at Winchester, be consecrated as Bishop in order that he bring about radical change. The letter is signed by the king, his brother and the bishops of Dublin, Meath and Leinster. See Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh*



noteworthy that Muirchertach and his brother were responsible for the consecration of Waterford's first Bishop in 1096, that they convened the ground-breaking Synod of Cashel in 1101 and that Muirchertach was resident in Limerick, as his principal city, when the city received its first Bishop in 1106-7. Indeed, as has been widely noted, the Irish reform movement seems very much to have had its initial impulse from Munster.<sup>308</sup>

Both Dumville and Flanagan have noted that, as a consequence of the reform movement, there were twelve recorded national and provincial synods between the years 1101 and 1179,<sup>309</sup> and while providing details on each of these would fall outside the scope of the current work, some comment on the national synods will help place the position of Lann in the twelfth century in greater context. The first of these, the Synod of Cashel, was a landmark event for the reform movement of the time, though, curiously, very little is recorded about the proceedings of the event other than the year in which it occurred (1101). The centrepiece event recorded by the annals was the gift, free from all dues and taxation, of Cashel itself, hitherto seat of the kings of Munster, to the church in order to reinforce Muirchertach's, and Munster's, commitment to the reform.<sup>310</sup> It is curious that Muirchertach dedicates Cashel not only to the church, but specifically to Patrick as the foremost saint of Ireland, thus politically acknowledging Armagh's headship of the Irish Church. The most detailed information available about the event comes from *Senchus Síol Bhriain*,<sup>311</sup> the genealogical tract relating to the Ua Briain family, which notes that Máel Muire Ua Dúnáin (1040-1117), Bishop of Munster, was appointed as Papal Legate by Paschal II and thus invested the Synod with Papal authority.<sup>312</sup> Little else is known about that synod; though far more is recorded about the Synod of Rath Breasail a decade later, mentioned in numerous annal and historical sources, in

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*and Twelfth Centuries*, 105. That the letter was signed by a selection of bishops from around Ireland pays heed to Muirchertach's status as Irish over-king.

<sup>308</sup> See Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 8.

<sup>309</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 2, and Dumville, 'Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages', 38-39. Dumville lists all the Synods to occur between the years 1096 and 1201 in *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, 38-39.

<sup>310</sup> The event is recorded in AFM and ATig s.a. 1101. For a general discussion on the synod of Cashel, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 159-179 and Ó Corráin, 'The synod of Cashel, 1101: conservative or innovative?', 13-19.

<sup>311</sup> O'Grady, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* (ITS 26), 174-5, and translated in *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* (ITS 27), 185-186.

<sup>312</sup> On Máel Muire and his reformist career, see Ó Corráin, 'Máel Muire Ua Dúnáin (1040-1117), reformer', 47-53 and Dumville, *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, 43.

which the discussions had at Cashel were enacted, and Ireland officially divided into dioceses with two archbishoprics, Tuam and Armagh (later revised to four to include Dublin and Cashel). The Synod of Uisneach in the same year made minor emendations to the proceedings of Rath Breasail. The latter has been studied extensively.<sup>313</sup> For current purposes, it is of note that it was presided over by Bishop Gilbert (Gilla Brigde or Gillebertus, a personal friend of Anshelm)<sup>314</sup> of Limerick, again a pontifical prelate, and attended by what appears to be a record number of clerics and secular leaders, including representatives from both the northern and southern parts of the country (Leth Chuinn and Leth Mogha, respectively). This growing northern involvement in the reform process is indicative of its spread throughout the country and its acceleration in development. No longer confined to Munster, the Cluniac-, Benedictine- and Cistercian-inspired reforms had truly become a national phenomenon.

The Northern reform movement was largely driven by Armagh, chief church of Patrick, now firmly acknowledged in the role of ‘national’ saint. If the community of Armagh were the driving force, then the instigator and inspiration behind the church was Malachy.<sup>315</sup> Seemingly a charismatic and forceful leader of the reform movement, Malachy, sent by Bernard of Clairvaux, brought with him from the Continent the strict tenets of Cistercian monasticism and sought to actively restore the canonical rules of the church throughout Ireland.<sup>316</sup> He was responsible for the foundation of Ireland’s first Cistercian house at Mellifont in county Louth in 1142,<sup>317</sup> and was in regular contact with Bishop Gilbert of Limerick, the Papal legate who presided over the Synod of Rath Breasail some decades earlier. Malachy also took an active interest in the Augustinian practices of Arrouaise in France,<sup>318</sup> thus further expanding Ireland’s repertoire of religious orders and shifting the

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<sup>313</sup> For discussion on Rath Breasail and detailed bibliographical notes see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 180-192 and Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 34-53.

<sup>314</sup> Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 10.

<sup>315</sup> A full biography of Malachy and his achievements are beyond the scope of the current work. Much attention has been paid to the charismatic figure and his career in Ireland. See Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 118-153, especially 118-122. See also the biography of Malachy written by Bernard of Clairvaux: ‘Vita Sancti Malachiae’ in Leclercque and Rochais (eds.), *S. Bernard Opera iii* (1963), 295-378, and translated in Meyer, *The Life and Death of Saint Malachy the Irishman* (1978).

<sup>316</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 123-135.

<sup>317</sup> Conway, *The Story of Mellifont*, 9-10.

<sup>318</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 136-147.

church ever further away from the (often) secular monastic lifestyle that had existed for centuries. It is, however, Malachy's relationship with Armagh that dominates the reform movement in that northern community.<sup>319</sup> As Gwynn has said:

‘An entry in AU tells us that his father, Mugróin Úa Morgair ... was chief lector of Armagh. From the genealogies of Dubaltach Mac Fírbisigh we learn that Malachy was also of the same stock as Maol Brigde son of Tornan, the saintly *comarb* of Patrick who died in 925 ... the saint's early life shows us that his upbringing was in the full tradition of Irish monastic asceticism ... The school in which he learnt his first lessons was almost certainly Armagh, though we must reckon with that general revival of Irish learning and piety throughout the five provinces which was already noteworthy in the last decade of the eleventh century.’<sup>320</sup>

After many political complications, including various claimants to the position of *comarba* of Patrick, and subsequent violence on the part of those secular leaders who supported them, Malachy assumed, unchallenged, the title of *comarba Pádraig* in 1135.<sup>321</sup> Now primate of Armagh, he spent the next two years, before his death, promoting the ascetic lifestyle and creating a community based on an amalgam of the spiritual, god-fearing manner in which he had been raised and the more intellectual reformist tendencies he had learned during his visits to the Continent.

As noted by Gwynn, the Synod of Kells is recorded by Geoffrey Keating as being held in 1152. However, much confusion surrounds the location at which the synod really took place.<sup>322</sup> The Annals of the Four Masters and the Annals of Tigernach both record the synod as occurring in Drogheda, and most likely at Mellifont, the Cistercian house founded by Malachy. Varying accounts provide for murky evidence as to the details of those present and any other information about what transpired at the gathering, but what is certain is that

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<sup>319</sup> For an overview of Malachy and his role in the political struggles regarding the See of Armagh, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 193-217.

<sup>320</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 193.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.* 214.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

Ireland was divided into four archdioceses: Armagh, Cashel, Tuam and Dublin.<sup>323</sup> The synod was likely convened following a request to the Pope to send a new Papal legate following Malachy's death. Cardinal John Paparo was duly sent, and evidently sought to continue the work instigated at Rath Breasail some forty-one years beforehand in providing Ireland with a structured system of bishoprics.<sup>324</sup> While monasticism continued in Ireland during and after these reforms, it did so largely in an altered state. Most of the larger monastic centres lost much of their secular influence to the new diocesan structures. It is in the middle of this reform period that we see the struggles between these two ecclesiastical modes, and which are so important for our understanding of Lann's position at this time.

Following the Synod of Cashel and the Synod of Rath Breasail, many monastic communities, especially those in Munster and at Armagh, embraced the new reformist ideals. As will be shown, others did not, which led to tension between the two groups. It is noteworthy that many of the non-reformist centres were located in the Midlands, the area most resistant to these new changes. We may assume that, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, large centres like Kells and Clonmacnoise were reluctant to part with their secularised, wealthy way of life. Kells in particular had a seeming obsession with property and wealth, as may be seen by its addition of twelve notices of charter material between 1033 and 1161 into the Book of Kells to invest them with a sacred authority.<sup>325</sup> While religious and sacred life was still evident in Kells, it was practised within the context of a larger community content to play the role of secular overlords.<sup>326</sup> Obsession with property and monetary wealth was not confined to Kells, or even to the Midlands. It has been noted that the attitudes of the reformist ecclesiastical institutions towards their secularised counterparts may have turned to criticism and ridicule during this period. The tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* has been interpreted as a

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<sup>323</sup> For an overview of the Synod of Kells, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 218-233.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* 219. See also Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 24. For a brief overview of the Synod of Kells, the archdioceses created thereat and subsequent diocesan structure for each of the Provinces, see Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 24-27. For a more complete discussion on the makeup of each of the individual dioceses and their constituent parishes, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 234-270 and Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Pagans and Holy Men: Literary Manifestations of Twelfth Century Reform', 143-161.

<sup>325</sup> Herbert, 'Charter Material from Kells', 61-2. See also Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 164-165.

<sup>326</sup> Herbert, *Iona Kells and Derry*, 98-108.

scathing attack by the Munster clergy upon the monastic communities of Kells and Cork.<sup>327</sup> The description of these sites by the protagonist of the tale, the scholar Mac Con Glinne, is satirical and none-too-forgiving, alluding to much gluttony and meanness leading to lack of hospitality towards travelling clerics. However, when the scholar visits the (reformist) community of Armagh, no adverse comment is made.

While Kells (or Cork) were wealthy and influential enough to pay little heed to such moral attacks from other monastic communities, the same cannot be said for Lann. This brings us to a key issue: how did Lann experience the reforms and how did it navigate the obvious tension permeating the Midlands in the twelfth century between reformist and non-reformist institutions? If Kells had a preoccupation with property, so too did Lann. As a small monastic foundation with little or no influence in the wider scheme of broader ecclesiastical politics, Lann sought to firmly hold onto its property. These efforts are investigated in detail in the following chapters. The complicated relationship between various ecclesiastical communities and Lann, as expressed in *BCh*, is also investigated in some detail in the following sections, which serve to provide insight into Lann and its political and ecclesiastical allegiances. For current purposes, it may be useful to make some preliminary remarks regarding Lann's stance on the reforms in order to set what follows in a clearer context. I have said that *BCh* on the whole is preoccupied with property and tithes due to the church. However, there are numerous subtleties in the Life which seek to portray Lann as a church reformed, and more concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of its lay community, and indeed its secular patrons. Flanagan notes that there was an increasing pressure for secular rulers to donate money and land to the church in order to gain its support. She mentions that 'ecclesiastical patronage ensured the reciprocal prayers of the beneficiaries and was an efficacious means of earning eternal salvation'.<sup>328</sup> Secular rulers had begun to consider their immortal soul's fate in the afterlife and patronage of an ecclesiastical foundation could go some way to ensuring the best possible outcome. Further to this, the very authority to rule was conferred upon a would-be king by God, whose representatives were the clergy. By extension, a king could not reign effectively, or with spiritual authority, without appeasing the local ecclesiastical foundation,

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<sup>327</sup> Herbert, 'Aislinge Meic Conglinne: contextual considerations', 65-72. For an edition and translation of the text see Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (1990)

<sup>328</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 196.

though this was by no means unique to the twelfth century.<sup>329</sup> A small foundation, half-way between the large communities at Kells and Clonmacnoise, and closer still to Rahan and Clonard, Lann needed as much patronage as possible; yet it had to vie with much larger, more influential, monastic foundations for such support. These political and ecclesiastical machinations are investigated more fully in the following sections.

The secular rulers were not the only group from whom Lann sought to extract tithes and fiscal support. The laity are also focused upon in great detail. Minutiae are provided in the Life for each and every local family group recorded therein. However, this may not necessarily be as blatant as it appears on first reading. It is useful to consider that, as Flanagan notes, ‘alms-giving was an integral element of preparation for eternal salvation’.<sup>330</sup> The laity were expected to donate to the church, perhaps not always monetarily, but with gifts (usually detailed very carefully) of food, clothing, livestock etc. Therefore, the claims of Lann regarding the dues of the local populace to ensure the continued protection of their saint was not necessarily out of keeping with reformist ideals.

It is hoped that the preceding overview has served to set in context the second section of the present work. The reforms set in motion during the eleventh century, which gained great momentum during the twelfth century, drastically altered monastic life. A return to the original ascetic ideals, an increasingly close relationship between ecclesiastical foundations and secular rulership, together with the reorganisation of ecclesiastical Ireland into a largely diocesan structure, placed increasing pressure on smaller monastic foundations. Increased secular militarism added extra impetus for a smaller institution, such as Lann, to reinvent itself and portray itself in a position of power, forming (or claiming) political links with other, more influential ecclesiastical institutions and secular overlords. It is in this turbulent period that the Lann meic Luacháin presented in *BCh* is situated. As a church about which almost no other source of information survives, the following seeks to investigate what the hagiography of Lann may tell us about the community’s navigation of secular and ecclesiastical politics. Further, Lann’s relationship with its local community will be

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* 196-198.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.* 198.

investigated. How did the church remind local lords and peoples of their fiscal duties towards it and what was the extent of this broader community? Through *BCh*, Lann sought reinvent itself, to a degree, by expressing their patron as a confident and often vengeful heroic figure through production of a new Life. While the following sections will investigate the methods by which this was attempted, it is hoped that the preceding overview has emphasised the necessity of engaging in this process in a turbulent political and ecclesiastical climate.

## Chapter 4 – Ecclesiastical Concerns

*Rochuinichset iarum naoim hÉrenn cotach for na trí Colmánu<sup>7</sup> faomait  
sium an cottach-sin do dénum friú...* ‘Then the saints of Ireland besought the  
three Colmans for a covenant; and they consented to make that covenant  
with them...’ (§52)

As a text written in and for the ecclesiastical community of Lann, *BCh* is significantly concerned with the situation of Colmán’s church, both internal and external. This chapter seeks to investigate the ecclesiastical concerns of *BCh*. By identifying the locations of church foundations mentioned in the text, and examining what tributes and properties are associated with them, the likely extent of the influence of Lann may be revealed. Moreover, Lann may be placed in a wider ecclesiastical context through investigation of the role of other saints in the Life. It will be shown that these figures often represent the institutions associated with them in the twelfth century, thus their treatment may be viewed as a reflection of how Lann viewed other ecclesiastical communities.

Religious organisation was in a state of wholesale change throughout the twelfth century. What had previously been a system of monastic settlements under the guidance of the *comarba* and *airchinnigh* of the patron saint<sup>331</sup> was replaced by a diocesan system under the rule of the bishops. Even in the Viking Era the monastic system was beginning increasingly to merge with secular society, resulting in widespread tension and even monastic warfare.<sup>332</sup> The reform of this system in the eleventh and twelfth centuries has been documented in no small detail by numerous scholars across a range of disciplines.<sup>333</sup> As such, the current

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<sup>331</sup> See, for instance, Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*; and ‘The Church in Irish Society, 400-800’, 301-330.

<sup>332</sup> Hughes, ‘The Irish Church, 800- c.1050’, 643 and 646

<sup>333</sup> For general overviews see Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 1-27; Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. For re-evaluations of more traditional views of this reform process, see Santry, *The Native Reform of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century – a reconsideration* and Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, together with other works alluded to in the opening remarks on the reform movements at the beginning of Section Two of the current work.



intention is not to provide a detailed overview of the reform process, but rather to query what effect it may have had on Lann.

As is shown in chapters five and six hereafter, Lann had predominant interests in property acquisition and the collection of tithes and dues. Maintaining the support of the local populace through a system of donations seems to have featured highly on the agenda of running the establishment. It may be that this, in no small part, was a result of its having grown accustomed to such wealth and secular influence that it, and its *airchinnech*, enjoyed. This merging of the roles of spiritual leader and secular lord was widespread throughout Ireland during the eleventh century, sparking much debate about the state of the church from the bishops of Canterbury, Lanfranc and Anshelm. As has been detailed above, they took a rather disparaging view of the situation and of Irish society in general, particularly in relation to marital abuses as is demonstrated by their correspondence with noted Irish ecclesiastical figures as well as the powerful Munster king, Toirdelbach<sup>334</sup> and his successor and son, Muirchertach Úa Briain<sup>335</sup>. These figures were royal driving forces behind widespread reform throughout Munster, as we shall see. However, Munster was not the sole instigator of the reorganisation of the Irish Church and the movement to rid it of its abuses. In the middle of the twelfth century Armagh, principal church of Patrick, was itself a driving force, largely under the direction of the charismatic and zealous Máel Maedóc, more commonly Malachy.<sup>336</sup> That Malachy himself much contact with reformist Munster, not least through his predecessor at Armagh, Cellach, is telling.<sup>337</sup> So too is his time spent at France with Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the prime instigators of the Cluniac reform movement, one of many

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<sup>334</sup> Obit given in *AT* s.a. 1086. Lanfranc had much other contact with Toirdelbach throughout the latter's military campaigns in Ireland in a seemingly advisory capacity. See Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century*, 68-82, Dumville *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages*, 40-41

<sup>335</sup> Muirchertach's obit is given in *AU* and *AT* under 1119. Lanfranc, writing to Toirdelbach Úa Briain in 1074, said that 'it is reported that in your kingdom a man will abandon his lawfully wedded wife at his own will, without any canonical process taking place'. Anshelm, writing, somewhat later, to Toirdelbach's son, Muirchertach Úa Briain, said 'It is said that men exchange their wives as freely and publicly as a man might exchange his horse'. See Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 6 and 7 respectively. A wider discussion on the reformist career of Muirchertach is given in Duffy, 'The Western World's Tower of Honour and Dignity', the Career of Muirchertach Ua Briain in Context', 56-73. For a discussion on the particular breaches of Canon law by Irish martial practises see Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, 184.

<sup>336</sup> Malachy obit is recorded under 1148 in *ATig*, *AFM* and *MIA*.

<sup>337</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, 193-217.

diverse movements in twelfth-century reformist Europe.<sup>338</sup> Of Malachy's time with Bernard and the latter's views on the state of Irish religious lifestyle, Gwynn has been noted that 'Irish life was no doubt rude to French eyes in the twelfth century, and Malachy was to find ample scope for his reforming zeal in the northern province'.<sup>339</sup>

While much may be said on the reform, its contributing factors and consequences, we must ask ourselves where Lann fits into this changing and turbulent landscape. Muirchertach Úa Briain had made the stunning gift of the Munster seat of kingly power, Cashel, to the Church at the synod convened at Cashel in 1101.<sup>340</sup> This synod was the first of three major attempts to reconstruct the Irish religious system, the others being a decade later in 1111 at Rath Breasail and in 1142 at Kells.<sup>341</sup> Of Muirchertach's vastly significant gift to the Church, Marie Therese Flanagan has noted that it was becoming an increasing trend that rulers should seek to be the benefactors of ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>342</sup> Theologically, a Christian ruler only had power by grace of God, and as such was subject to His appointed guardians of the faith on earth. A ruler wishing to make a claim over a provincial or national kingship would be greatly benefitted by making a gesture of favour towards the ecclesiastical powers that be. God would surely grant favour to those who looked kindly on his clerics. Muirchertach's grandfather, Brian Boramha, did something quite similar on his path to bringing a large portion of the Island under his control when he visited the altar of Armagh and left the sizeable donation of twenty ounces of gold upon it.<sup>343</sup> This would have been mutually beneficial, as patronage of Armagh by the most powerful ruler in the country would allow them stronger claim over the title of patron of the whole of Ireland for Patrick, which in turn would re-enforce Brian's claim to a national High-Kingship. A consequence of this mutually beneficial relationship between ecclesiastical and secular rulers was the continuing growing of the reform movement which, gaining strength in the south and north of the country, began

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<sup>338</sup> For a good source of information about Bernard, his Vita, teachings, philosophies and Rule, see G.R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*. An excellent overview of the Continental reform of the twelfth century is provided by Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, together with other works outlined previously. A discussion of the various European orders is given in Constable's chapter on 'The Variety of Reformers', 44-84.

<sup>339</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, 195

<sup>340</sup> AFM

<sup>341</sup> AU, AFM under 1111 and 1142 respectively

<sup>342</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth century*, 196-202

<sup>343</sup> AU, AFM 1004

to encroach upon the Midlands, the most densely populated monastic area and perhaps the most accustomed to an unreformed focus on wealth and secular influence.

The synod of Rath Breasail in 1111 divided Ireland into diocese. This was amended later that year and again changed at the synod of Kells some forty-one years later. This, by-and-large, gives Ireland its diocesan structure today. As is remarked hereafter Clonmacnoise was not originally the seat of a Bishop, the synod instead favouring Daimliag, today Duleek. This was changed in the months following the synod, likely as a result of Clonmacnoise exerting its not-inconsiderable influence.<sup>344</sup> Clonmacnoise, its influence and relationship with Lann are more fully discussed in the following sections, but for present purposes it is significant that one of the most ambitious and secularly powerful monastic establishments in the country, and by extension one of the least reformed, sought to engage with this new structure of ecclesiastical governance. This may have been an attempt to maintain profitable relations with local influential rulers whom, as we have discussed, sought to have their earthly power confirmed by an ecclesiastical element. Lann too, then, shows its desire to be seen as a newly-reformed ecclesiastical centre. Colmán in his Life (§26, 31) is said to have been a monk who also took the order of the church, i.e. that he became a priest. This begins to remove the saint from the more typical confines of monastic asceticism which is common in earlier hagiography, and paints him as being a new, reformist saint. His Rule, espoused towards the end of the Life (§105) describes the pious efforts of the saint to ‘remove his mind in meditation on earthly things, dwelling on heavenly things’. While somewhat formulaic that the pious, spiritual and priestly figure is nevertheless largely absent throughout the rest of a Life in which the majority of his is spend acquiring property and/or wealth for his church by any means possible.

Lann, then, presents a fascinating example of small and seemingly largely ignored ecclesiastical site in the Irish midlands, one of many, caught between the nearby large centres of Clonmacnoise and Clonfad and Rahan. The politics surrounding those churches, together with the reform movement gaining momentum from Cashel to the south and Armagh to the north, encroaching upon Mide, must have placed a small settlement in a precarious situation.

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<sup>344</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, 182-183.

Whom to ally oneself with in order to weather the ecclesiastical and secular storm of the period must have been a question of paramount importance. As will be demonstrated, the role that the aforementioned powerful settlements occupy in the literary output of Lann can shed great light upon the political and perhaps secular concerns of a small ecclesiastical settlement in the turbulent twelfth century. As a starting point, attention will now be turned to Lann's own outlying daughter-settlements, where investigation will take place into how Lann viewed itself and its paruchia, the functions of the latter and how far removed from the reformists of Munster and Armagh it may truly have been.

#### 4.1 The *Paruchia* of Lann – Church foundations

Fig. 10 – A brief overview of the seven principal churches of Colmán

Church	Par.	Location	Details
<b>Cell Bec</b>	12, 13, 14, 29, 62	11 miles east of Lann, near Kinnegad	The first church founded by Colmán
<b>Cell Uird</b>	19, 26	Near Fermoy, Co. Cork	Colmán's Munster church. Possibly associated with Mochuda
<b>Úachtor Comartha</b>	61	Probably north of Mullingar, 2 or 3 miles north of Lann	Colmán receives his bell, the <i>findfaídech</i> here.
<b>Carraic Léime ind Eich</b>	44, 45	Near the south-eastern shore of Lough Ennel, 3 miles south of Lann	The Uí Bréanáin and the Uí Máel Bethaid are stewards here.
<b>Less Dochuinn</b>	46	To the east of Lann, possibly near Léna	This church may have contained part of the staff of Colmán
<b>Léna</b>	43, 44	About eleven miles east of Lann, possibly to the south of Cell Bec	
<b>Lann meic Luacháin</b>	17, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 37, 40, 42, 45, 49, 65, 66, 78, 82, 87, 90, 97, 99, 101,	In Fir Thulach on the north-eastern shore of Lough Ennel	The principal church of Colmán. Location of the composition and copying of <i>BCh</i>

Seven churches are attested in *BCh* as having been founded by the saint. With the exception of Cell Uird, near Fermoy, Co. Cork, their location may be identified in quite close proximity to Lann. Colmán's churches are at Úachtar Comartha in Uí Thigernáin, later the barony of Moyashel and Magheradernon, to the north-east of Lann (§61); the churches of Léna, Carraic Léime ind Eich and Less Dochuinn are located in Uí Fhorranáin lands, in the barony of Moyfenrath, to the east of Lann (§43, 45, 46); Cell Bec was founded in Fir Bile, the later barony of Farbill, also to the east of Lann (§12); the church of Lann meic Luacháin itself is in Fir Thulach, later the barony of Fartullagh, about two and a half miles south of present-day Mullingar, Co. Westmeath (§42). Lack of information about these churches, Lann excepted, outside of the Life, suggests that they must have been minor foundations with little influence beyond their immediate area of jurisdiction. This is not to say that we are entirely denied access to information about these small midlands churches. Data in *BCh*, when viewed in context of the aims of the Life, may allow insight into the role of these churches in their community, and the tributes which they claim. The majority of the foundations attested by *BCh* are represented as the result of a grant of land by secular powers. In general, such a grant was made in gratitude for the performance of a miracle (§26, 44, 45), though the land on which Lann was built is claimed as having been granted through angelic intervention (§29), and not as miracle recompense (§39). The twelfth-century tendency to claim that rulers who were benefactors, builders, and protectors of churches would be the first to enter heaven along with the saint, may also have been capitalised on by Lann.<sup>345</sup>

A prophecy by the Bishop Etchén (§11) states that Colmán will have 'seven chief cemeteries'. A gloss on the text, presumably by the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century scribe, notes the following:

*secht prímrelgi.i. a trí díbh a n-Úidh Foranán .i. Les Dochuind 7 Léna 7 Carrac Léme in Eich 7 Ceall Uird a Mumain 7 Cell Bheacc 7 Úachtar Comartha a nÚibh Tigernáin 7 Lainn meic Lúacháin, nó comad iat secht cealla asberad .i. cella a triar bráthar 7 a secht sethar, ar is éisimh i cend sin immaleith eter maccu 7 ingénu*

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<sup>345</sup> See Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth century*, 196-202.

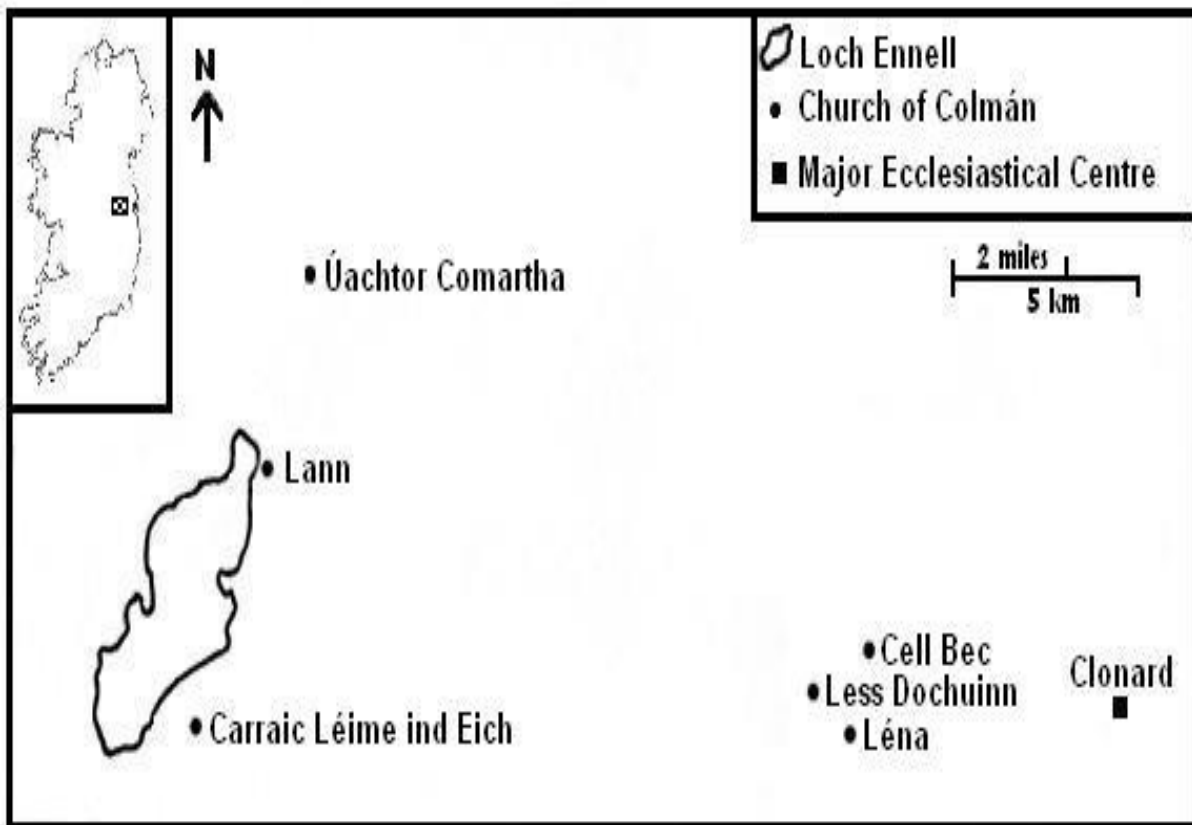
‘seven chief cemeteries, i.e. three of them in Uí Fhorranáin, viz., Less Dochuind and Léna and Carrac Léime-ind-Eich; Cell Uird in Munster; Cell Bec and Uachtar Comartha in Uí Thigernáin; and Lann meic Lúachain. Or these may be the seven churches alluded to, i.e. the churches of his three brothers and of his seven sisters, for he is the head of them all, both sons and daughters’.<sup>346</sup>

The listed cemeteries correspond to Colmán’s churches enumerated above. The glossator’s alternate suggestion that the ‘seven churches’ were those founded by the saint’s siblings seems unconvincing. Of the saint’s three brothers, Midna travels to Rath Mór in Kerry (§9), while Crónán and Érnán travel to the Slieve Bloom Mountains, west of Ross Finnglaise, some forty miles south of Lann (§9). Three of the seven sisters go to Cluain Gamnae, the land of their uncle, Anfossaid, about 3 miles north east of Lann (§9), two, Luache and Luachet, go to Cell Luache in Leix, close to sixty miles south east of Lann, Mongdub goes to Craeb Ullan(now unidentifiable) while the final sister, Lessar, is placed in Delbna Ethrae, about thirty miles from Lann (§9). The majority of these areas are quite far removed from Lann, unlike its six associated churches mentioned in the Life.

*BCh*’s testimony regarding Colmán’s churches follows.

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<sup>346</sup> *BCh*, introd. i.



Map 4: Eastern and Western Communities

The above map shows Lann, Úachtor Comartha and Carraic Léime ind Eich seemingly forming the western community of Colmán, while the three remaining churches appear to be an eastern branch. The churches of this eastern branch are located within a small radius, suggesting a close-knit community. *BCh* mentions Lann's eastern community and its churches as being quite distinct (§45). What may cause these communities to be separated? It is likely that the boggy conditions of the intermediate land is a central factor.<sup>347</sup> Colmán's church at Cell Uird, in County Cork, appears to be anomalous, perhaps representing traditions associated with Mochuta rather than Colmán. It is the only church mentioned in the *Life* outside the limits of this small circumference, and there appears to be no evidence to firmly

<sup>347</sup> There is a small bog to the north-east of Lann, which extends southwards by some kilometres. A small bog is also present to the south east. Together, these may have served as a natural barrier to settlement, creating distinct communities of Lann to the east and to the west. See Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, 155, plate xiii North-Western Region: Topographical. This map also shows the Bog of Lann, to the north-west of the church, which is mentioned in *BCh* (§27).



associate it with Colmán of Lann, as will be shown below. Cell Uird aside, it may be useful to group the churches founded by the saint into western and eastern categories in order to fully explore Lann's contemporary communities.

### 1. *The Western Community*

*As mochean an dám innair is aníar, im imdaidh cen brón, is inmain in tríar.*

‘Welcome the community from the west and the east, in my chamber without sorrow, beloved are the three!’ (§34)

#### a) *Carraic Léime ind Eich*

According to *BCh*, the church founded at Carraic Léime ind Eich was built upon land which was given to Colmán in gratitude for healing the foot of the King of Ireland, Domnall mac Áedo (§44, 45). Seventeen estates of land<sup>348</sup> are noted as being granted to Colmán together with Dún Léim ind Eich.<sup>349</sup> One of the longest lists of provisions and regulations of any property grant in the Life is to be found here. The text affirms that Domnall guarantees the land's freedom from taxation by any of his close family, the Uí Fhorranáin, who are also Colmán's kinsmen (§3).<sup>350</sup>

The land around Carraic Léime ind Eich was clearly important to Lann. There may also be a suggestion of a perceived tension between the Fir Thulach, on whose land Carraic Léime ind

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<sup>348</sup> The significance of the number seventeen in this instance, together with others (§59, 73), is difficult to ascertain. The figure does not seem to represent the pre-Norman invasion divisions of territory which MacCotter notes in *Medieval Ireland*, 45-57. However there may be a tenuous link with the seventeen divisions of the *indfhine*, the *terminus* family grouping, at least in the psychology of the period. Land areas of a particular family grouping may be claimed via the Life, divided according to each member of the extended family group. Thus the Life claims all the land associated with one family grouping. This, however, is unsubstantiated and must necessarily remain supposition. On the *indfhine* see McLeod, ‘Kinship’, 7-8.

<sup>349</sup> Dún Léime ind Eich is mentioned in AU s.a. 586 as being the site of the slaying of the Uí Néill king, Baetán mac Ninneda, by Cuiméne at the instigation of the latter's father, Colmán Bec.

<sup>350</sup> The Uí Fhorranáin are noted as being descended from Maine, grandfather to Colmán (§3). See Chapter 1.1, ‘Genealogical Information’.

Eich was, and their Uí Fhorranáin neighbours to the east (§45). Colmán specifies, in great detail, a list of misfortunes that will befall those who transgress against the church, or attempt to claim taxes from it. He states that the local kings of Uí Fhorranáin will lose one hundred times as much as they take from the church, and that the same fate will apply to any king of Tara who does the same (§45).<sup>351</sup> *BCh* notes that the king of Tara, as overlord, should recompense the church to the price of seven cows, unless the abbot agrees to take a smaller price for a captured community member. The hagiographer goes on to say that Domnall then grants a freedom from tax to the churches *a fus* ‘here’, presumably where the author is writing, at Lann, and to the churches in Uí Fhorranáin to the east, and all the lands associated with them (§45). Thus Lann is claiming that protection from taxation for the majority of its churches and lands has been granted directly by the king of Tara. It would appear that the repercussions from non-observance are still being actively threatened in the twelfth century to any ruler who may see fit to exact taxation. The episode includes a warning both to the local Uí Fhorannáin kings, and to their Uí Néill overlords.

The stewards of the eastern churches of Colmán are named as the Uí Bréanáin and the Uí Maíl Bethad.<sup>352</sup> For guarding the privileges of the church they are entitled to one third of the clothes of the dead in the east, and one third of the winding sheet (§45). The stewards of the eastern branches of Colmán federation also function as smiths at the main church of Lann (§45).<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Moreover, Colmán states *maidm fair an cath ule i mbiad nech díb-so, mad ar éicin berar íatt himach* ‘every battle in which any of them may be shall be broken upon him, if they are carried off by force’. Meyer notes the *íatt* here as ‘i.e. any of Colmán’s *familia* who are compelled to go on a hosting for the king’. See *BCh*, 45, note 1.

<sup>352</sup> Neither of these are in evidence in sources available to us, at least for the area. There is an attestation of the Uí Bréanáin in Connacht, but it is unlikely that this group, in south-east Galway, would have had much connection with midlands Lann, given especially the lack of other references to Connacht on the part of the hagiographer. See Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 662.

<sup>353</sup> *BCh*, introd. i-ii. For a discussion on the offices of Lann see Chapter 6.2 ‘Lann and its Community’.

## b) *Úachtor Comartha*

Úachtor Comartha was founded on land granted to Colmán by Conall Guthbinn, following the saint's miraculous restoration of the king's damaged island-fort (§60). Indeed, the particular incident of the founding of the church also includes the saint's acquisition of a bell, the *findfaídech*, sent from heaven to Colmán upon completion of his church (§61). While the episode may function partially to emphasise the miracle of the saint's reception of a relic, it also provides a large amount of detail regarding the place-names of the surrounding land that has been granted to Colmán. The author utilises the formula of granting seventeen estates also used elsewhere (§45).<sup>354</sup> The Life relates little else about Úachtor Comartha. Paul Walsh, a native of Westmeath, was unable to identify the area in modern nomenclature, though *BCh* locates it in Uí Thigernáin, to the west of Rath Chonaill (§61). Based on this internal evidence, it is likely that the site is somewhere to the north of Mullingar, or at least in the town's general northern or north-eastern environs. Unfortunately there is no evidence to illuminate its location with any greater accuracy.

## 2. *The Eastern Community*

*noerberad bith co menic innti-sen eter a manchu tair...* 'and he used often spend time there among his monks in the east...' (§43)

### a) *Cell Bec*

Cell Bec, the Little Church, is said to have been established by the saint when he is only three years old (§12). It is described as being north east of Less in Daire, the land of his father, Luachán, the area in which the saint spent his younger years. There are attestations of Crónán Cille Bice,<sup>355</sup> and Ernán Cille Bice<sup>356</sup> both of whom are claimed as brothers of Colmán in the

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<sup>354</sup> This is a grant of seventeen estates of land made by Domnall mac Áedo. The significance of the number seventeen has been discussed previously.

<sup>355</sup> Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 176.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.* 176 and Ó Riain, *CGSH*, 155, 708.104.

Life (§9). Regarding the former, the Life notes that November first, one of the feast days claimed for Colmán, may be also claimed for Crónán (§2). However, this speculation does not help to locate Cell Bec. The Life indicates that Fursa, returning to Cell Bec following the death of Colmán, was able to hear the bell tolling at Lann (§97). Kuno Meyer assumed that Cell Bec was in Uí Thigernáin, due to a reference to this area in the Life in connection with the church (§13).<sup>357</sup> Paul Walsh clarifies this issue, pointing out that Cell Bec is specifically said to be east of Fid Dorcha, in which Lann was situated (§29), whereas Uí Thigernáin was to the north. He thus identifies Cell Bec as Kilbeg, near Kinnegad in Co. Westmeath, and about eleven miles due east of Lann.<sup>358</sup>

*b) Less Dochuinn*

Little is said about Less Dochuinn in *BCh* aside from the fact that it is in Uí Fhorranáin, and therefore to the east, perhaps south-east, of Lann. The place-name does not survive, so its location is uncertain. It is likely, however, that it was not at a great remove from Colmán's other church in Uí Fhorranáin, Léna. The Life reports that Colmán was resident in this church when he performed a miracle to keep the local cows away from their calves (§46). The hagiographer informs us that the mark of the staff used by the saint to perform this miracle is visible on the rock, thus reinforcing the saint's connection with his local 'sacred landscape'.<sup>359</sup> The detail is also added that the staff in question should be kept in the churches of Colmán's community in the east, i.e. in Uí Fhorranáin. There is no other mention of the staff in *BCh*, but it is possible that some staff, or other relic of the saint, was indeed kept at one of these churches.

*c) Léna*

The Uí Fhorranáin are presented in *BCh* as relations of Colmán who grant him some of their own land (§43). This is identified as Léna, presumably to be linked with Mag Léna 'the plain

<sup>357</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Colmáin*', 265.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Compare the 'sacred landscape' of Saint Brigit in Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints*, 143, 192.

and heath of Moylen',<sup>360</sup> northeast of Durrow and thus either in, or near, the territory of the Upper Moyfenrath barony, in which the Uí Fhorranáin were resident. Such a location would place it somewhat to the south of Cell Bec. In the episode, this land is said to have been donated to Colmán as a *screpul soscélae* 'gospel tax', the sole use of this term in the Life.<sup>361</sup> The area is freed from taxation by a grateful Domnall mac Áedo, following the curing of his foot through the intercession of Colmán (§44). The author notes that, in gratitude, two hunting hawks are given to Colmán.<sup>362</sup> It seems that Léna was an important church to Lann, as the saint is located at the site more than once in *BCh* (§43, 45).

### 3. *Cell Uird*

*Úa hÁengusa erchinnech Cilli Uird... 'Úa hÓengussa, airchinnech of Cell Uird...' (19)*

The Life describes Colmán's youthful stay in Munster, most notably around the area of Lismore (§20-4). The foundation of Cell Uird occurs following the performance of a miracle which raised Dúngal, son of Máel Fothbil, king of Fermoy, from the dead (§25). In gratitude, Dúngal gives Colmán one hundred and fifty cows, as well as a site on which to build the church of Cell Uird, now Kilworth, which is about three or four miles from Fermoy, County Cork.

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<sup>360</sup> Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 523.

<sup>361</sup> Fergus Kelly has noted that the early law texts 'devote relatively little attention to such transactions' in an ecclesiastical context, due to the largely non-legal nature of the 'sagas, annals and saints' Lives'. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 121. However Kelly is here referring to earlier material and it has become apparent that, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, gospel books and saints' Lives might well have claimed a legal status for the material presented within them, more in line with secular society. For examples of such material see Herbert, 'Charter Material from Kells', 61-62 and 'Before Charters? Property Records in Pre-Anglo-Norman Ireland', 108-109. Of this secular society, Kelly notes of a gift of land that it may be given 'in the hope of obtaining some political or social benefit, but the law will not compel the recipient to respond according to the donor's expectations. Often a donor may not be seeking a particular return for his gift, but rather has the general aim of securing friendship, enhancing his own prestige or honouring the recipient. The exchange of gifts between two persons or groups forms a social bond with mutual obligations', *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 120. This appears to be the most likely relationship between the Uí Fhorranáin and Colmán, presented, perhaps, from a twelfth-century perspective.

<sup>362</sup> Further conditions are set out by Colmán regarding the restrictions, obligations and repercussions attached to this freedom from tax, as noted above under d) *Carraic Léime ind Eich*.

Cell Uird, translatable as ‘Church of the Order/Liturgy’, is noted by the text *Crichad an Chaoillias* the church of ‘Tuath Úa Conaill’, the territory of the Uí Dublaide chiefs.<sup>363</sup> Plummer, on the basis of information in *BCh* (§26), suggested that the church name referred to ‘the Roman Easter of which Molaise of Leighlin was an advocate’.<sup>364</sup> Meyer held that ‘Ord’ may refer to the new *Ordo Celebrandi* such as Saint Ailbe is said to have sent for to Rome.<sup>365</sup> However, the Life itself mentions specifically that the church is called Cell Uird *ar is inti tósech túarcgabhad an t-ord tuc Molaisi leis ó Róim* ‘because in it the order which Molaise had brought with him from Rome was first set up’ (§26). This suggests that the author is attempting to portray his subject as being one of the first of the *romani*,<sup>366</sup> following the Roman Easter calculation, rather than the controversial Irish method of computation.<sup>367</sup> However, such a portrayal finds no support in the rest of the Life, or indeed any other source.<sup>368</sup>

That Cell Uird was part of Lann’s network is indicated further by *BCh* in a notice of a grant made to Colmán while studying with Mochuda at Rahan. *Acell* behind an *ibrach* ‘yew wood’ is granted (§19), with detailed measurements and a list of guarantors included. The land extended *ótá in ibraig conici in croiss 7 in srait fil frisín crois indnís... 7 secht traigid fichet inti* ‘from the yew wood as far as the cross and the road which is below the cross... and there are twenty seven feet in it’, and witnesses include Airechtach, the *airchinnech* of Lann, and one of the Úa hOengussa, *airchinnigh* of Cell Uird. A list of guarantors includes Úa Ferchair, Úa hÁedacáin, Úa Dercáin and all the Céili Dé.<sup>369</sup> This is comparable to instances of

<sup>363</sup> Power, *Crichad an Chaoilli*, 52. Power also notes that other groups mentioned as being local to Cell Uird were the Uí Mhangáin, the Uí Chuilinnán and the Uí Bhroccáin.

<sup>364</sup> Plummer, *VSH*, introd. xlvii.

<sup>365</sup> *BCh*, introd. v.

<sup>366</sup> Sharpe, ‘Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century’, 58-72 and Ó Néill, ‘Romani Influences on Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin literature’, 280-290.

<sup>367</sup> Ó Cróinín, and McCarthy, ‘The “Lost” Irish 84-year Easter Table Rediscovered’, 227-242. Much debate was caused by this new Order in Britain and Ireland, culminating in the synod of Whitby in 664. See Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 360-362.

<sup>368</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3. For a discussion on the influence of the reform movements of the twelfth century on some larger ecclesiastical centres, see Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, 161-168.

<sup>369</sup> The Uí Fherchair were a sept of the Cenél nEoghain, O’Brien, *CGH*, 179, 146 c 48-58, while the Uí Dercáin were part of the Uí Théig of the Laigin dynasty, *Ibid.* 77, 125 a 20. The Uí hÁedacáin were in Éile, Munster, Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 660. These country-wide attestations allow for the whole of Ireland to guarantee the transaction.

property transactions among the charter materials in the Book of Kells,<sup>370</sup> which date to about the same period as the composition or compilation of *BCh*.<sup>371</sup> If, as appears likely, it represents a contemporary addition to *BCh*, the mention of an *airchinnech* of Cell Uird in a transaction involving both Lann and its patron is significant.

Herbert states that ‘By situating the ownership of the site in the saint’s lifetime, hagiography presented the grant as an affirmation of an existing right, and thereby, perhaps, made it more acceptable to the local community directly involved. It also unambiguously identified the saint as beneficiary and protector’.<sup>372</sup> While this is evidently applicable in this instance, the identities mentioned in the property record must be investigated further. The Uí hÓengussa are attested as being one of the branches of the Déissi Muman,<sup>373</sup> of the south-eastern part of Munster, in close enough proximity to Cell Uird to have had dealings with the church there. Moreover, Lismore is right in the middle of this territory. In light of these links with Lismore, Cell Uird perhaps may have been a church affiliated to Mochuda, rather than to Colmán. By extension, the small church at Rahan claimed by Lann, and carefully measured by the *airchinnigh* of both Lann and Cell Uird, may also originally have been a church affiliated to Mochuda. Its claim by Lann may arise by virtue of a relationship with the Uí Shúanaigh, the hereditary abbots of Rahan since the middle of the eighth century.<sup>374</sup> MacCotter has argued that Cell Uird represents a detached portion of the *paruchia* of Lismore, wholly surrounded

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<sup>370</sup> For example, a note on folio 6 recto to folio 5 verso of the Book of Kells reads *fiad laechaibh maithibh imdaib .i. i fiadnaise Tigernán Uí Ruairc rig fer mBreibne uile* ‘in the presence of many noble laymen, i.e. in the presence of Tigernán Uí Ruairc, king of all the men of Bréifne. A note dating to the latter quarter of the eleventh century on folio 6 verso notes that *Isiat immora slain ocus dilsí do rata ina dilsí in disirt sin .i. sruithi Cenannsa fadain cona n-abbaidd; ri Mide .i. Maelsechlainn mac Conchubair hUi Maelsechnaill co rigraid... Bennacht Isu Crisd ocus Choluim Chille cosna huilib noebaib nime ocus talman for cech n-oen morfas cadus ocus chúthaid na hedparta sin* ‘These then are the securities and the warranties for the appropriation of that retreat i.e. the seniors of Kells itself with their abbot; the King of Meath i.e. Maél Sechlainn mac Conchubar Uí Maél Sechnaill with the princes and the nobles of Meath ... The blessing of Jesus Christ and Colum Cille with all the saints of heaven and earth to anyone who magnifies the honour and dignity of that gift. See Mac Niocaill, ‘The Irish “charters”’, 155.

<sup>371</sup> As noted by Herbert, entries to the Book of Kells on folio 6 verso and folio 7 recto are datable to the late eleventh century, while an entry on folio 27 recto is datable to between the years 1114 and 1117. The remainder of this latter folio is filled with ‘small cramped script... sometime between 1117 and 1133. See Herbert, ‘Charter Material from Kells’, 62.

<sup>372</sup> Herbert, ‘Before Charters?’, 116.

<sup>373</sup> O’Brien, *CGH*, 400-401, 328 d.

<sup>374</sup> The obit for an anchorite of Rahan, Fidmuine Uí Suanagh, is given in AU s.a. 750 and AFM s.a. 757. An abbot of Rahan, Fidairle, has his obit in AFM s.a. 758.

by the diocese of Cloyne until at least the fourteenth century.<sup>375</sup> If this is the case, then the hagiographer of *BCh* may have been aware of the influence of Colmán of Cloyne in the twelfth century. Can there be confusion concerning which Colmán was associated with Cell Uird? MacCotter's assertion that the church was part of the Lismore *paruchia* makes such unlikely. However, it remains a possibility that an influential church such as Cloyne, and its patron, Colmán, may have had associations with Cell Uird that were borrowed by the hagiographer of *BCh*.

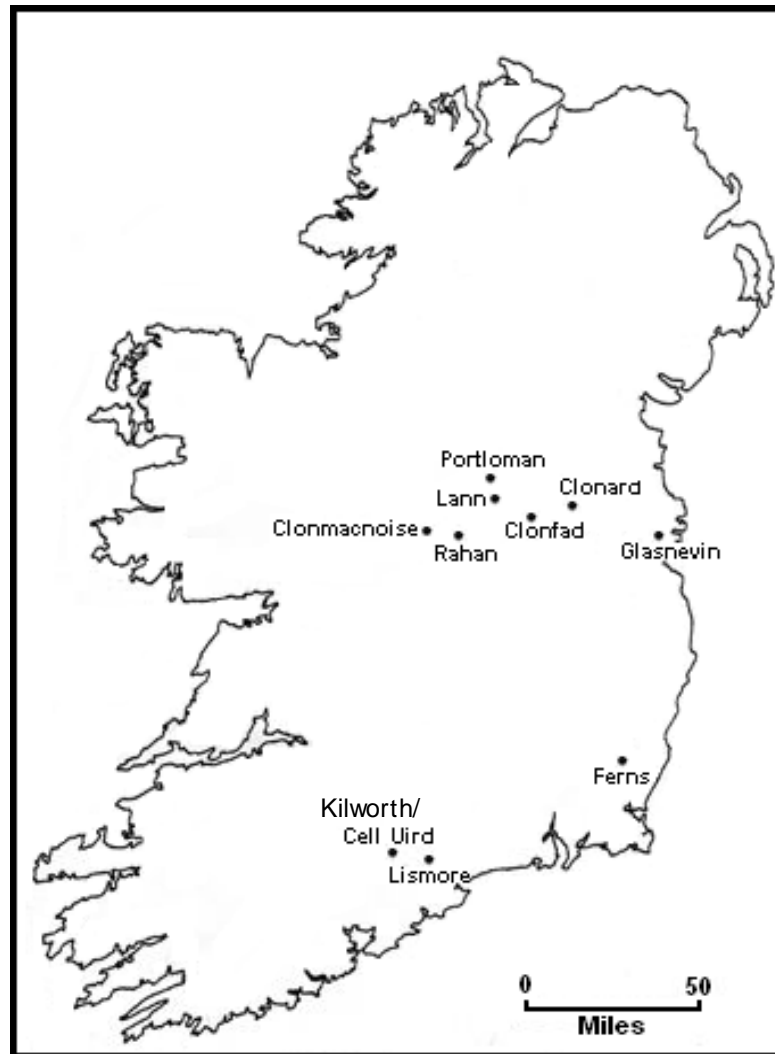
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<sup>375</sup> MacCotter, *Colmán of Cloyne: A Study*, 83-84.



## 4.2 Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours

*Luid Cíarán Chúana co Colmán mac Lúacháin do chuncid ænta & cennachta fair. ⁊ rofaillsiged sin do-sum ⁊ nírbo cett lais.* ‘Ciaran of Clonmacnois went to Colman son of Luachan to ask union and headship of him. And that was revealed to him and he did not wish it.’ (§85)



Map 5: Major ecclesiastical sites mentioned in *BCh*

*BCh* must be viewed as a complete work, comprised of inter-related elements. How do the episodes relating to different hagiographic figures relate to each other, and to the Life as a whole? What purpose do they serve in relation to other elements of the text? The author of *BCh* is foremost concerned with local figures, originating perhaps from a need to address local issues on the part of Lann's monastic community. In order for the Life to serve as a means to reiterate the claims of Lann over both property and tribute, it must present the status

of the church as being derived both from history and from the spiritual authority of its patron. Information contained within the Life is often reframed by the author into a form which suits the needs of Lann, both politically and financially. The political aims of Lann are portrayed in a number of ways. Numerous secular figures in *BCh* represent the political views of their descendants, while ecclesiastical figures similarly represent the churches founded by them, or part of their *familia*. Saints mentioned in the Life are thus characters created by the author to fit his required picture of the social milieu.

The hagiographer of *BCh* was presented with a great challenge in drawing together the Life's many details into a coherent unit. No less difficult is the task of unravelling this information to illuminate what it can tell us about its author, and the church community at Lann which produced the Life. It is important to remember that the full value of *BCh* may only be revealed when it is viewed as a whole.

There are no fewer than ten saints with whom Colmán is brought into contact in *BCh*.<sup>376</sup> Numerous others are mentioned by way of comparison.<sup>377</sup> Consideration of these figures does not immediately suggest any connection with Colmán mac Luacháin, either temporal or geographical. Indeed, the author of *BCh* does not seem overly concerned with rationalising the chronology of the Life. To attempt to do so would necessitate the belief that Colmán lived through three separate centuries.<sup>378</sup> Indeed the Life rationalises that he lived for one hundred and forty seven years (§11). Rather than assuming historicity, it is more useful to view the other saints in *BCh* as representatives of the churches of which they are patrons. Thus the interaction between Colmán and these figures is probably indicative of the relations between Lann and other ecclesiastical communities in the hagiographer's time. Important ecclesiastical figures are introduced in relation to particular hagiographical topics or political circumstances of Lann. For instance, when discussing Fir Thulach, the author includes figures known in the locality e.g. Bishop Etchén (§4, 7, 10), Bishop Conchraid (§42, 53, 54)

<sup>376</sup> For example Bishop Etchén (§4, 7, 10 etc), Mochuda (§18-24), Colmán Elo (§31, 33, 42), Aedán (§42, 71, 72), Fursa (§42, 97, 98), Colum Cille (§52, 56), Mobí (§77-79).

<sup>377</sup> Such as Patrick (§55), and Brigit (§58).

<sup>378</sup> Colmán, while at least in his late twenties, is brought into contact with Ciarán, whose obit is recorded s.a. 549 by AU, Colum Cille, whose obit is given in AU s.a. 597, AFM s.a. 592, and Fidmuine Úa Súanaig, whose obit is given in AU s.a. 750 and AFM s.a. 757.

and the two Colmánas, Colmán Comraire and Colmán Elo (§31, 33, 42).<sup>379</sup> Of these, Colmán Elo is perhaps most widely attested, having Latin and Irish Lives.<sup>380</sup> Less is known about the other figures, though Bishop Etchén is mentioned as having ordained Colum Cille. The mention of such saints as Moling Luachra (§71), Áedán of Ferns (§42), or indeed Mobí of Glas Noíden (§77-79) is not immediately explicable. Moreover, the puzzling ‘Munster element’ of the Life, in which Colmán of Lann is depicted as spending time with Mochuda at Lismore (§18-24), requires some comment. Why has the author included so many important ecclesiastical figures? The relationships depicted in the Life fall into particular categories. Ecclesiastical and associative relationships may reflect an historical or a political basis for the inclusion of certain figures, while hagiographical influences may illuminate the influences of other saintly works upon the author. Saintly figures may be included because of their role in hagiography. These are investigated in turn.

#### *a) Ecclesiastical and Associative Relationships*

It has been mentioned above that, in some cases, saintly relations may represent internal church relations in the medieval era. If this be so, what relationship can Lann have had with Tech Moling, Ferns or Glas Noíden? Colmán’s visits to each of these locations remind the audience of the Life that Colmán had influential allies, and therefore must have some degree of influence himself. The synods of Cashel<sup>381</sup> and Rath Breasail<sup>382</sup> in the early twelfth century changed the structure of the Irish church.<sup>383</sup> In Meath, Daimliag, today Duleek, and Clonard were named as diocesan centres, with Clonmacnoise later replacing Duleek.<sup>384</sup> Lann may have found itself in the middle of what has been described as ‘monastic empire

<sup>379</sup> Etchén’s church was at Clonfad, about ten miles east of Lann. See Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 264. Conchraid is said to have resided at Tech Cholmáin, probably near Lann, but unattested. Colmán Elo’s principal church was at Lann Elo, about twenty miles south of Lann, near Tullamore, Co. Offaly. See Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 475.

<sup>380</sup> For example see ‘Vita Sancti Colmáni Abbatis de Land Elo’ in Plummer, *VSH*, 258-273; Colgan ‘Colmánus Lannensis’, 792-793 and ‘Betha Cholmáin Elo’ in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 168-182. For an index to further Lives and comparison between them, see Sharpe *Medieval Irish Saints’ Lives* (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>381</sup> AU, AFM s.a. 1101.

<sup>382</sup> AU, AFM s.a. 1111.

<sup>383</sup> See Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 155-192 and Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 1-27.

<sup>384</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 182-183.

building<sup>385</sup> on the part of powerful Midlands establishments like Clonard to the east, and Clonmacnoise to the west. In light of the negative view of Clonmacnoise implied in the Life of Colmán (§85), it is unsurprising that the affiliations claimed in the Life lay largely to the south, towards Rahan and Lann Elo, and to the east, towards Clonard.<sup>386</sup> I would suggest that Lann chose to ally itself with the emerging eastern ecclesiastical powers of Meath, and indicated this through the Life of Colmán.

Clonmacnoise, expanding greatly from around the eighth or ninth century onward,<sup>387</sup> enjoyed the patronage of secular dynasties on either side of the Shannon River, allowing it to swiftly become one of the most influential monastic institutions of the midlands. To the east of the Shannon, its patronage came from Clann Cholmáin, who had a close relationship with the church.<sup>388</sup> That Rahan was becoming large and powerful in the seventh century was probably unwelcome to an ambitious Clonmacnoise. This, as Francis John Byrne points out, ‘was bound to cause certain frictions’.<sup>389</sup> By the twelfth century, Lann would have needed very strong reasons to refuse to acknowledge the primacy of Clonmacnoise (§85), especially given its new status from 1111 as head of the newly formed diocese of western Meath.<sup>390</sup> It is possible that Lann claimed alliance with Lismore and Rahan as being more advantageous to its own identity than becoming a satellite church of Clonmacnoise. The hagiographer has skilfully included the Uí Shúanaigh to allow Lann to enjoy the protection of Rahan in the twelfth century, as well as highlighting an alliance between Mochuda and Colmán. Ironically, given its seemingly unreformed state, and the great attention to details concerning property

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<sup>385</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 171.

<sup>386</sup> See Map 4: Major Ecclesiastical centres mentioned in *BCh*.

<sup>387</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 241.

<sup>388</sup> A prayer for Flann Sinna (916), son of Maél Sechnaill I, is inscribed onto the bottom of the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise. Tempull Maél Sechnaill is also named after the dynasty, Manning, *Clonmacnoise*, 32, 42. Conchubar Úa Maél Sechnaill (1073) was also buried at Clonmacnoise. See Walsh, ‘The Ua Maélechlainn kings of Meath’, 171.

<sup>389</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 171. The annals note a number of instances of this friction in relation to Clonmacnoise, most notably perhaps in s.a.764 in AU and A.Tig, when the institution became jealous of the swiftly growing Columban foundation of Durrow, which had garnered patronage from the ruling Clann Cholmáin dynasty. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 66. This led to the battle of Argaman between both foundations, resulting in Clonmacnoise victory, and the deaths of two hundred Durrow monks. Clonmacnoise also weathered the severe Viking raids of following centuries, emerging stronger than before as it incorporated smaller, weaker foundations that could not withstand the raids.

<sup>390</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 182-183.

and wealth throughout *BCh*, the church community at Lann may have had far more in common with Clonmacnoise than it may have liked to admit.<sup>391</sup>

Figures mentioned in the Life, such as Colmán Elo, Colmán Comraire and Fursa, do indeed appear to form an eastern midlands group of midlands saints.<sup>392</sup> Other saints in the Life, less likely to have a direct relationship with Lann, may have been included by virtue of their relationship with these eastern-midlands figures. For instance, Colmán is presented in *BCh* as journeying around the *toídiu* of Saint Moling (§71),<sup>393</sup> with whom he shares the same feast day of June seventeenth.<sup>394</sup> It is noteworthy that Colman's next destination on his travels is the church of Áedán, or Maedóg (§71), closely linked with Moling in the Life of Áedán.<sup>395</sup>

## b) Hagiographical Influences

### 1. Colmán Elo and Colum Cille

There are numerous similarities between the Life of Colmán mac Luacháin and that of Colmán Elo.<sup>396</sup> The description of Lann Elo with its causeway stretching to Coill an Chláir<sup>397</sup> is quite similar to the description given of Lann meic Luacháin and its causeway, built by the monks of Motura (§27-8). While the acquisition of soil from the apostles' Roman graves is conventional in contemporary hagiography, the theft of this soil is an unusual detail, common to both Lives.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> On Clonmacnoise in the twelfth century, see Kehnel, *Clonmacnoise, the Church Lands of Saint Ciarán*, 129-133 for an overview of secular relations and 139-144 where she describes the ecclesiastical aristocracy.

<sup>392</sup> Fursa's inclusion here rests on an association with Slane. See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 318, note 177.

<sup>393</sup> For discussion on the *toídiu*, see below Chapter 4.2, 'Lann and its Ecclesiastical Neighbours'.

<sup>394</sup> Colmán is not mentioned in the main text of the *Félire* under this date, but rather in the notes, where he is described as *in uno die cum Moling*. See Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, 150.

<sup>395</sup> 'Betha Máedóg', Plummer, *BNÉ*, 187, 189, 244.

<sup>396</sup> 'Betha Colmáin Ela', Plummer, *BNÉ*, 168-182.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.* 172, §15.

<sup>398</sup> The mother of Colmán is the perpetrator in *BCh* (§77, 82). In the Life of Colmán Elo, earth sent to him by his tutor, Saint Gregory is stolen by members of the Columban community of Durrow, without the knowledge of their abbot, Cormac Úa Líatháin. See 'Betha Colmáin Ela', Plummer, *BNÉ*, 173, §18-21.

Another similar element in both Lives is the role of the saints' staffs. *Betha Colmáin Ela* does not make many claims to tribute. In cases where tribute is demanded for Lann Elo, the *bachall* 'staff' of the saint becomes the focal point of the saint's authority. Colmán Elo demands *cíos na mbachall* 'the tribute of the staffs' from the Fir Chell.<sup>399</sup> The *bachall* is brought on a *cuairt* 'circuit', exacting tribute at numerous junctures. The consequences of not paying this tribute are also given.<sup>400</sup> While Colmán mac Luacháin does not make such a circuit with his *bachall*, it does serve in demands of tribute (§49, 60). In *BCh*, there is also an exchange of staffs between the two Colmáns (§83). This is set in Rome, where Colmán Elo ties a cowl of blue around his *bachall* in order to differentiate it from the staff of Colmán mac Luacháin. For this reason, the staff is known as the *bachlach cochlach* 'hooded staff' (§83). However, in *BCh*, when Colmán mac Luacháin takes the side of Conall Guthbinn, king of the southern Uí Néill, in battle against Áed Róin,<sup>401</sup> a *bachall cochlach* is deemed to be the instrument of Conall's victory (§91).<sup>402</sup> Is the author borrowing from the tradition of Colmán Elo here?

There are differences in emphasis between the traditions of the two Colmáns, however. In the Life of Colmán Elo, Mochuda, expelled from Rahan, curses the Fir Chell in the midlands,<sup>403</sup> angering Colmán Elo and Colum Cille.<sup>404</sup> Tension with Mochuda does not occur in *BCh*, which reflects Colmán's devotion to the Rahan and Lismore patron. However, the depicted relationship between Colmán Elo (§31, 33, 76, 77 etc), Colum Cille (§52), and Colman mac

<sup>399</sup> This was the term used to describe a portion of the midlands inhabited by the Cenél Fiachach. It was referred to as *Fir Chell* 'men of the churches' because of the large number of churches in a small radius, and also the large percentage of land under the control of influential monastic institutions such as Rahan, Durrow and Lann Elo. See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 225.

<sup>400</sup> Colmán Elo notes that *Ni thiubhra muir a monadh, / Is ní tiubhra an talam toradh; Gorta gach ratha is doigh, / Teirce bídh ocus édoigh; Fa crích fFer cCeall amach, / O théid mo bhachall diomdach*

"The sea shall not yield its tribute, / The Land shall not yield increase; Famine is to be expected in every quarter of the year, / Stint of food and raiment; throughout the border of the Fir Chell / when my *bachall* returns thankless". See 'Betha Colmáin Ela' in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 177 §28.

<sup>401</sup> Áed Róin mac Cathail. The battle is recorded in AU s.a. 604, though here it states that it was a foster brother of Conall's, and not the king himself, who slew Áed.

<sup>402</sup> For further discussion on the *bachall* of Colmán see Chapter 6.1 'Relics and Miracles of Colmán and their function', (b) *Relics*.

<sup>403</sup> 'Betha Colmáin Ela' in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 180-182, §36-39.

<sup>404</sup> AU s.a. 636, Byrne notes that the 'monastic empire building was bound to cause frictions', thus the expansion of Rahan as an influential monastic centre is likely to have caused dissent amongst its neighbours, adding to the Easter controversy which may have played a large role in the expulsion also, Mochuda being expelled *in deibus paschae*. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 171.

Luacháin is also very positive in *BCh*. The relationship between Colum Cille and Colmán Elo may have influenced the inclusion of both in *BCh*.<sup>405</sup>

Another saint who apparently appears by association in *BCh* is Mobí of Glas Noíden,<sup>406</sup> whose tomb is visited by Colmán on his return from Rome (§77-79).<sup>407</sup> Mobí is not attested in many sources,<sup>408</sup> but does feature in the Irish Life of Colum Cille.<sup>409</sup> Mobí is also named, along with Colum Cille, as one of the ‘twelve apostles of Ireland’, under the tutelage of Finnén of Clonard, who appears in *BCh* as tutor to the three Colmánas of Meath (§79). In the sixteenth-century Life of Colum Cille by Maghnas Ó Domnaill,<sup>410</sup> its subject, leaving Ireland for Scotland, is asked who will take his place in Ireland. He replies ‘I will leave you three saints... Colmán Elo, Colmán Lainde son of Luachán, and Mochoemóg of Cumreuire in Mide’.<sup>411</sup> The mention of the three Colmánas of Meath in this context in the sixteenth century suggests the tradition of the trio of Colmánas was long-lasting.

## 2. *Mochuta, Ciarán and the Uí Shúanaigh*

According to *BCh*, Colmán travels to Rahan at the age of seven years to study with Mochuda (§18). When the young saint reaches seventeen years of age, he travels *for deoradecht asa athardæ féin* ‘in exile from his native land’ together with Mochuda at the time of the latter’s expulsion from Rahan (§20).<sup>412</sup> There is no direct mention of Colmán mac Luacháin in any

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<sup>405</sup> The Irish Life of Colmán Elo presents Colum Cille as a maternal uncle of the saint. See ‘Betha Colmáin Ela’ in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 168, §4.

<sup>406</sup> Obit given in AU s.a. 545, or in AFM s.a. 544.

<sup>407</sup> Glas Noíden, today Glasnevin, is close to the port of Dublin, and may have represented a common place of pilgrimage for those leaving for Britain and the continent, or indeed returning from it.

<sup>408</sup> See, for example, Bernard and Atkinson, ‘The Preface to the Hymn *Noli Pater*’, 28. Mobí’s pedigree is found in the Liber Hymnorum on 82.

<sup>409</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 255-256, §29-32.

<sup>410</sup> O’Kelleher and Schoepperle, *M. Ó Domnaill: Betha Colaim Chille*, 212.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* 212, §219.

<sup>412</sup> The expulsion of Mochuda from the midlands is recorded by AU as occurring in 636. We know that Mochuda died shortly after reaching Lismore. His obit is recorded by AU s.a. 636 and by AFM s.a. 637. The Lives of Mochuda claim that the saint and his community were driven out of Rahan because of the jealousy of neighbouring ecclesiastical communities. See ‘Beatha Mochuda’, in Power, *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuta*, 122-124 and Plummer, *BNÉ*, 304-306. Colmán, disciple of Mochuda, follows the exodus into

surviving material relating to Mochuda, apart from a reference in the Irish Life to the presence of numerous Colmáns at Rahan.<sup>413</sup> During Colmán's time with Mochuda, the author tells us that he was sent to the king of Fermoy (§24), from whose son he ultimately acquires the gift of land upon which he builds Cell Uird (§25). Colmán goes on to spent seven years in Lismore, before removing to Cell Uird for a further sixteen years, during which time he adheres to the conventions of the pious saint, like fasting on Cnoc Brénainn (§26). Aside from the grant of property on which to build a church, the time spent at Lismore seems to be more concerned with Colmán's spiritual development, showcasing his relationship with the lepers, claiming that they would only be satisfied when Colmán himself attended to them (§20). Fr. Power maintains that the leper colony, supposedly located about one mile east of the monastic settlement, may have existed up to and after the time of the author of the Life of Mochuda in the eleventh or twelfth century. If so, it is possible that the author of *BCh* would have been aware of a contemporary leper colony at Lismore.<sup>414</sup>

A careful relationship is created by the author of *BCh* between Mochuda and Colmán, and, by extension, Lismore, Rahan and Lann. In the Life, Colmán refuses to acknowledge Ciarán as his superior, stating that only Mochuda will have that privilege (§85). This begs many questions about the relations of Lann in the twelfth century with its midlands neighbour, Clonmacnoise.<sup>415</sup> Given the author's familiarity with sources relating to Mochuda, it is likely that he would have known that Clonmacnoise was not held in particular esteem. *Indarba*

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Munster. While Rahan may have been originally founded by Mochuda, it is likely that Lismore was already in existence upon his arrival, as obits are in evidence in AFM s.a. 634 and AU s.a. 635 for an abbot of Lismore by the name of Eochaid, or Echuid, a year before the supposed arrival of Mochuda. A declining monastic settlement may have been revitalised following the exodus from Rahan. As for the latter, the account of the 'Sons of Úa Súanach' identifies them as founders. See 'Do Mhacuibh Ua Suanach' in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 312-316. What is more likely, as pointed out by Power in *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuta*, 189-190, note 74, is that they were the restorers of Rahan in the eighth century, and became hereditary abbots of the institution for a time, eventually becoming mistaken for its founders. Thus the abbots of the site in the twelfth century held the title of *comarba* of the Uí Shúanaigh, rather than of Mochuda. Fidmuine Úa Shúanaigh appears in two separate instances in the Life of Colmán (§42, 17), demonstrating the author's awareness of the figure as an important one in the midlands. Interestingly, however, his Rahan association is not mentioned (§75).

<sup>413</sup> Power, *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuta*, 120.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.* 191, note 79.

<sup>415</sup> In the period before the twelfth century, Clonmacnoise would have held influence over a number of subsidiary churches in Mide. It is possible that it sought to add Lann to this list. for a description on the likely churches which formed the *paruchia* of Clonmacnoise from around the tenth century onwards, see A. Kehnel, 'The Lands of St. Ciarán', *Clonmacnoise Studies vol i, Seminar Papers, 1994* (Dublin, 1998) 11-18.



*Mochuda a rRaithin* ‘The Expulsion of Mochuda from Rahan’ depicts Crónán mac Loígde, vice-abbot of Clonmacnoise as being the prime instigator.<sup>416</sup> Crónán is mentioned in the notes to *Féilire Óengusso*.<sup>417</sup> Whether there is any factual merit to these accounts or not, the image portrayed is one that leaves little doubt that the authors of the *Indarba* and Lives of Mochuda were not favourable towards the community of Ciarán. The author of *BCh* clearly shares this view. A number of other similarities in the Lives of Colmán and Mochuda may suggest that the author of *BCh* was familiar with the traditions of Mochuda. Both saints are presented as being served by deer,<sup>418</sup> while in a similar way, angels assist both figures.<sup>419</sup> Colmán’s close relationship with the lepers of Lismore is also reflected in the Life (§20).

Making sense of the political relationship between Lann and its neighbouring institutions, as presented in the *BCh*, is complex. There seems to have been an early tradition of an association between Colmán and Mochuda, but the *BCh* representation may be in part due to the close relationship between Mochuda and Colmán Elo, expressed a number of times in the Lives of both saints.<sup>420</sup> The hagiographer weaves his knowledge of traditions relating to Mochuda into his text: the saint’s foundation of Rahan, subsequent expulsion, and final foundation of Lismore. He reflects his awareness that contemporary Lismore is associated with Mochuda, as Rahan is with the Uí Shúanaigh family. The church of Cell Uird may not have been founded by Colmán mac Luacháin, or presided over in a meaningful manner by Lann, but it does serve to allow the hagiographer to present his subject’s close relationship with Mochuda, Lismore and Rahan. The relationship presented in *BCh* between Mochuda, Colmán and the Uí Shúanaigh also allows Lann to refuse the supremacy of Clonmacnoise. In short, the hagiographer of *BCh* seems to have included all available material to him regarding the traditions relating to Mochuda.

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<sup>416</sup> For an account of this expulsion see ‘Indarba Mochuda a rRaithin’ in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 300-311. Crónán is noted in his instigator role in the same text on page 305. However, in AU s.a. 637 Crónán is given as *abbas Cluan Moccu Nois*.

<sup>417</sup> Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 96, note to March 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>418</sup> Compare ‘Beatha Mochuda’ in Power, *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuda*, 96, in which deer plough the land at Mochuda’s request, to *BCh*(§29).

<sup>419</sup> Again, compare ‘Beatha Mochuda’, in Power, 121, in which angels perform manual labour for Mochuda, with *BCh*(§84), where angels run races for the monks of Colmán, who are tilling a field.

<sup>420</sup> Mochuda appears in ‘Betha Colmáin Ela’, Plummer, *BNÉ*, 180-182 while Colmán Elo appears in ‘Betha Mochuda’, Plummer, *BNÉ*, 295 and ‘Beatha Mochuda’, Power, *The Lives of Saints Declan and Mochuda*, 91, 99, 143.

### 3. Moling and Áedán

As we have seen previously, Colmán is shown to make a pilgrimage to the ‘*toídiu*’ (§71) of Moling,<sup>421</sup> though the latter figure does not appear in the Life directly. What exactly the *toídiu* denotes is uncertain, but seems to refer to a stream or watercourse of some sort that Moling purportedly dug from the river Dubhglass to his monastic settlement at Tech Moling.<sup>422</sup> The Latin Life of Moling states that Moling promised to ‘pray... for the sins of those who would perambulate... that water... in the manner of a pilgrimage’.<sup>423</sup> Is the hagiographer of *BCh* enhancing his subject by borrowing details from other hagiographic texts at his disposal? Moling is described as spending time in a cave<sup>424</sup> while *BCh* (§45) depicts its subject at *Uam Cholmáin* ‘Colmán’s Cave’ near Dún Léime ind Eich.<sup>425</sup> Both the Life of Moling<sup>426</sup> and the Life of Colmán (§29) share references to the angel Victor, possibly both ultimately derived from Patrician sources.<sup>427</sup> Victor instructs Moling not to build a church in a particular place,<sup>428</sup> while in *BCh*, Victor instructs the saint to stop the construction of Lann until he be shown the true site of his church (§29). Details such as these, while not evidence for a direct borrowing, highlight the hagiographer’s knowledge of his genre. They are included in *BCh* in a subtle manner.

Following Colmán’s stay at Tech Moling, he travels to Maedóg at Ferns (§71), with whom he makes a union. The hagiographer adds the detail that the Uí Dochartaig family at Lann are descendants of Crob Criad of Ferns (§72). Does Áedán fit into the scheme of *BCh* through his associations with Moling? There are a number of details in the Life of Maedhóg which have parallels in *BCh*. Colmán’s colloquy with Onchú, king of Fir Thulach (§49) recalls a similar

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<sup>421</sup> Chapter 4.2 a), ‘Ecclesiastical and Associative Relationships’.

<sup>422</sup> Fryckenberg, ‘Suibhne, Lailoken and the *Taidiu*’, 105.

<sup>423</sup> Plummer, *VSH* ii, 193-194.

<sup>424</sup> Stokes, *The Birth and Life of Saint Moling*, 12.

<sup>425</sup> For other instances see Stokes, *Féilire hUí Gormáin*, 242, December 19<sup>th</sup> and Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*, 196.

<sup>426</sup> Stokes, *The Birth and Life of Saint Moling*, 13, 21.

<sup>427</sup> Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*, 28, 62, 252. The episode appearing on p 252 is quite reminiscent of §29 of *BCh*.

<sup>428</sup> Stokes, *The Birth and Life of Saint Moling*, 21.

episode<sup>429</sup> concerning tribute due from the Uí Briuin to Ferns,<sup>430</sup> repeated in equal detail in verse.<sup>431</sup> Had Áedán and Moling more connection with Lann than is immediately apparent? Could their relationship with Colmán have had literary foundations?

#### 4. *Fursa*

Fursa, associated most notably with Péronne and the continent, nevertheless has connections with the north-eastern midlands.<sup>432</sup> Evidence suggests that he may have been the *patronus* of Slane.<sup>433</sup> The Latin Life of Fursa notes that he is of noble birth, which would have been possible,<sup>434</sup> as Charles-Edwards points out, if he were of the ‘collateral line of the royal kindred of the Conailli Muirthemni’.<sup>435</sup> This however links Fursa with southern Ulster, around the area of today’s Cooley Peninsula. Is there a tradition of Fursa which makes a link with Lann and the midlands more likely?

Fursa’s matrilineage is in evidence in the Book of Leinster: *Brónach ingen Milchon maic Buain co mbáe Pátric i ndáire, máthair... Colmáin Chomraire... ocus Fursu Craibdig in Perona* ‘Brónach, daughter of Miliuc, son of Búan, with whom Patrick was in bondage, [was the] mother of...Colmán of the Casket...and Fursa the Pious in Peronne’.<sup>436</sup> Besides the

<sup>429</sup> ‘Betha Maedhóg’, Plummer, *BNÉ*, 202-203, §41-44.

<sup>430</sup> The Uí Briuin were from the Bréifne region in the north-midlands. In the Life of Áedán, the Uí Briuin are presented as being the most closely associated family group with the saint before he moves southwards to Leinster, when his early principal church seems to have been Drumlane (Druim Lethan) in the Breifne area, about forty miles north of Lann. See ‘Betha Maedhóg’ in Plummer, *BNÉ*, 206-207, §53-4.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.* 204-206, §48-52.

<sup>432</sup> A note to January sixteenth in *Félire Oengussa* on page 44 relates that he was of the Conailli Muirthemni in north-east Leinster. See also Ó Ríain, *CGSH*, 105, 662.215.

<sup>433</sup> This is supported by mentions in the annals of abbots of both Slane and Peronne, in France, which Fursa purportedly founded in the year that he died, AU s.a. 648, 649, 656 and 661. Of the abbots, an entry in AU s.a. 825 relates that ‘Colmán, abbot of Sláne and of other monasteries in Francia and Ireland, died’. Similar entries are to be found which mention the hereditary succession of the Mac Cormaic family, members of which are variously referred to as ‘abbot of Louth’, ‘abbot of Sláne’, ‘abbot of Dám Liaig’ and ‘abbot of *Cathair Fursi* in Francia (i.e. Peronne)’ in AU s.a. 758, 779, 789 respectively.

<sup>434</sup> ‘Vita S. Fursei’ in Heist, *VSH*, 37-55.

<sup>435</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 318, note 177.

<sup>436</sup> Ó Ríain, *CGSH*, 131, 702.1-5; 179, 722.92.

reference to Colmán Comraire as one of the ‘three great Colmán’s of Meath’,<sup>437</sup> this is one of the few sources in which the saint is mentioned. Is it possible that Fursa had been brought into traditions associated with Colmán via his relation to Colmán Comraire, as seems to be the case with Colum Cille and Colmán Elo? With numerous genealogical variants, it has been suggested by Stokes that there were a number of saints by the name of Fursa in the tradition, though eclipsed by the most famous of the name.<sup>438</sup> Stokes’ view is supported by annal references to two figures by the name of Fursa: the first from Ess mac nEirc,<sup>439</sup> and the second an abbot of Lecan Mide in Co. Westmeath,<sup>440</sup> noted as being close to Bunbrosna, which is only a few miles north-west of Mullingar. Could it be this Fursa, rather than Fursa of Péronne, that is intended in *BCh*? The latter settlement is much closer to Lann than Slane is.

The hagiographer of *BCh* makes no mention of foundations by Fursa in Britain or the continent, nor is there anything else to suggest that the figure in question is the founding saint of Péronne apart from the epithet *craibdech*, ‘the pious’ or ‘the devout’ (§42, 97).<sup>441</sup> The author may have been aware of a tradition of a Fursa in relation to Colmán and Lann, onomastically attested in the names *ulaid Fhursae* (§42) and *Croiss Fhursa* (§97) at Lann. By the twelfth century, the traditions of a local Fursa may have fallen together with the traditions of the more famous saint of that name.

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<sup>437</sup> Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 137, note to May 24<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>438</sup> Stokes, ‘The Life of Fursa’, 386.

<sup>439</sup> AU s.a.753. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 402, gives Ess mac nEirc as either Esmakirk, north of Moylurg in Co. Roscommon, or Assylin, also in Co. Roscommon.

<sup>440</sup> AU s.a.751. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, 480, gives Lecan Mide as located north-west of Mullingar in Co. Westmeath.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. *Fursa craibthech* in Stokes, ‘The Life of Fursa’, 396, §14.

## *Summary*

A study of the churches of Colmán, their locations, and details of their foundations provides much information on the settlement of Lann and the extent of its influence. At times, the author of *BCh* sees fit to reiterate that the lands on which the churches stood has been granted by a secular ruler free from all taxation, and that severe consequences would follow for any subsequent ruler wishing to transgress against that church. In other cases such details are not given. Does this suggest that some churches may have been more likely to attract attention from secular rulers because of their situation and/or property? What becomes quite clear is that the cult of Colmán was not just located around his primary institution. Indeed, there seems to be a strong, though localised, tradition of the saint in the east, indicated by evidence concerning the churches of Léna and Less Dochuinn. These also provide an outside radius for the influence of Lann, which seems to extend eastwards from the church by about eleven miles, northwards by about two miles and southwards by about three miles. There is little evidence for any extension to the west. On the whole, the information provided through a study of the churches of the saint, Cell Uird aside, suggests that Lann and outlying churches formed an ecclesiastical microcosm. This was reliant on secular rulers, both local and regional, and reliant on tribute from the surrounding laity to whom it administered. To this end, the hagiographer seeks, throughout the course of the text, to show favour to both local rulers and their overlords, which presented difficulties, as relations between the two groups were not always cordial.<sup>442</sup> The extent of this institution's influence, then, seems to have been no more than about fifteen miles in diameter. While at times the author painstakingly records the minutiae of the lands on which the churches are located, tributary requirements are mainly specified in the case of Lann itself.

The inclusion of many saints in *BCh* seems to come from personal alliances and discord portrayed in the Life between Colmán, Mochuda and Ciarán, and may reflect relations between the churches at Lann, Rahan and Clonmacnoise. Lann attempts to protect its position from an expanding Clonmacnoise, by portraying itself as allied to Rahan.

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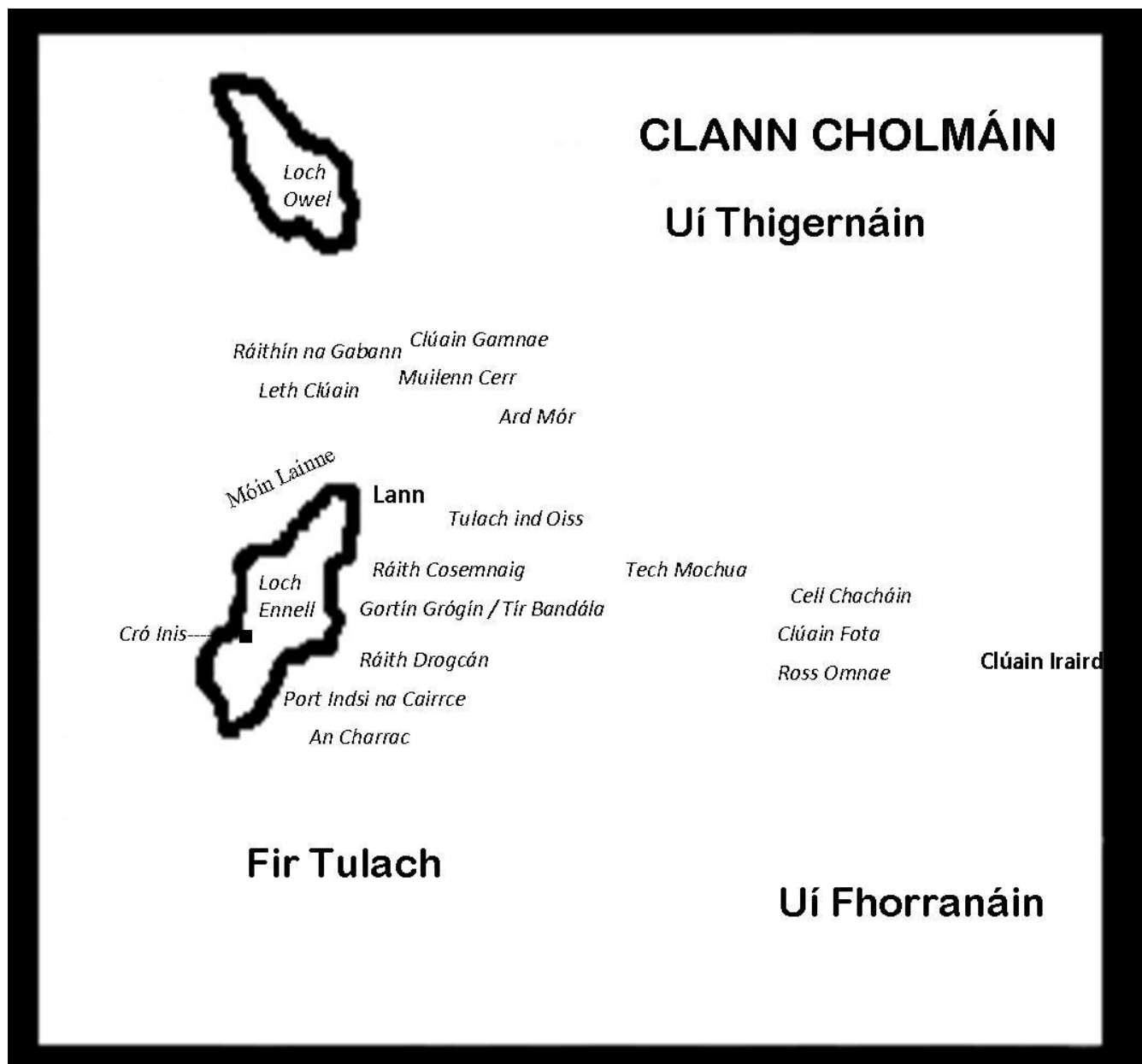
<sup>442</sup> See Chapter 5 for further information.

The author constructs saintly alliances, drawing on a large range of information available to him, as well as on his own impressive knowledge. Opportunities are rarely overlooked to expand the description, or draw in further information. The hagiographer utilises information contained in the sources at his disposal to modify and enhance the figure of his patron, Colmán. Motifs and details attributed to other saints are often utilised, sometimes not particularly covertly. It is more likely, however, that a general familiarity with the material, and influence from numerous sources, are key in the author's composition, rather than any direct plagiarism.

From the wide range of sources he seems have utilised, it may be possible to suggest that the author had access to a large repository of information. This conclusion alone provides valuable insight into Lann in the twelfth century. It is also probable that there were more sources, of which he was aware, that are lost or unfamiliar to us today. As such, we are presented with a skilled and knowledgeable individual, weaving together numerous hagiographical and other sources to create characters and situations that both enhance the moral and religious superiority of Lann as a twelfth-century church, and are reflective of political stances and situations. The treatment of clerical figures does not end with the immediate and necessary characters influential to Colmán and Lann. The author seems to expand on certain themes that link figures and events in a way that is not linear.

## Chapter 5 – Secular Concerns of *BCh*

*it saire sin uile ó chís rí 7 flatha 7 tuaithe archenæ...* ‘they are all exempt from tax of the king and chief and tribe as well’ (§41)



Map 5: Some Sites in Meath and Westmeath identifiable in *BCh* (Not to Scale).<sup>443</sup>

<sup>443</sup> Some of the placenames noted on this map may be accurately identified. Others are placed in their most likely position based on all available information. In all cases it should be noted that, due to the imperfect scale of the map, some of the positions may not be entirely accurate. Nevertheless, it conveys the closest representation yet available of this onomastic data.

## 5.1 Lann and Fir Thulach

*Táncatar malle dochum Colmáin & dorónsat a manchine dó eter bás & bethaid & a ferann ar bithdílsi co bráth, conid síatt is fine griein ac Laind ósin alle.* ‘They both together came to Colman and granted him service both in death and life, and their land to be his own for ever. And from that time onward they have been the glebal family in Lann’ (§39)

In the course of archaeological surveys of the area, it has been noted by Karkov and Ruffing that:

“Lynn monastery was no doubt also dependent on these wealthy sites [Cró-Inis and Dún na Scíath]. Located at the eastern mouth of the Brosna, it is ideally situated to take advantage of local trade and traffic. The importance of monasteries as trading and economic centres, as well as their dependence on secular endowments and commissions, is well known (Kenny 1987, Ryan 1988, Smyth 1982). And while the Brosna was never big enough for navigation by larger craft it would certainly have been navigable by small local traders... Lynn, however, never seems to have developed as an economic force. It certainly could never have rivalled the great monasteries of Clonmacnoise, Durrow or Clonard also situated in Clann Cholmáin territory. Indeed in his discussion of the importance of monasteries as trading centres, Michael Kenny (1987, 577) noted the number of coin hoardes on monastic sites – Clonmacnoise, Rahan, Durrow, Monasterboice, Kildare, Glendalough, Armagh – yet nothing has come from Lynn. It may be that being located so close to the secular site of Dún na Scíath / Cró-Inis led to the monastery’s complete dependence on the site. It never rivalled Clonmacnoise or Durrow because it was not permitted to. The Clann Cholmáin kings would certainly not have wanted an economic and political power such as Clonmacnoise on their doorstep.”<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Karkov and Ruffing, ‘The settlement systems of Lough Ennell’, 59.



It may be a valid point that Lann's expansion and growth was hindered by Clann Cholmáin, yet evidence in *BCh* does not support the claim that Lann was entirely dependent on the dynasty. The opposite seems to be the case. While Lann may have claimed much tribute and property from the Mide kings, these claims seem less likely than the claims made of local population groups, namely Fir Thulach and neighbouring families.

In the absence of formal charter documents, *BCh* appears to be the main repository for information relating to property claimed by Lann meic Luacháin. The majority of the geographical areas mentioned in the Life are in Fir Thulach, the district in which Lann was situated. Examination of these locations, together with information relating to Fir Thulach rulers in *BCh*, may illuminate the likely extent of Lann's influence geographically. Moreover, it offers insight into the role of a small midlands monastic community within its society, how it functioned, and how it viewed its situation. The interaction between the ecclesiastical institution and its locale may be further placed in a wider context. To what extent did Lann rely on the Fir Thulach for secular patronage or protection in the turbulent times of the twelfth century? What can this tell us about the relationship of Lann and the Fir Thulach with their overlords, Clann Cholmáin?

Lann is situated in the Irish midlands in the northern part of Fir Thulach lands, which extended from the church northwards for two or three miles, and about ten miles in radius to the south, east and west. The limits of Fir Thulach land are roughly equivalent to the later barony of Fartullagh, which derives its name from the population group.<sup>445</sup> Most of the property and tribute mentioned in the Life is associated with this region. This suggests that the Life was fundamentally concerned with its locality. About one third of *BCh* makes reference to property rights, or details the tributes due to Lann and its patron. Some twenty five percent of the Life relates to land located in Fir Thulach, while a further twenty percent mentions the area, or its population, in some way (e.g. §13, 50, 58, 82, 85 etc). These figures seem to indicate that the Life was focused, to a large degree, on an area not more than about twenty five miles from Lann. A large number of the locations mentioned in the Life are, in

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<sup>445</sup> See Walsh, 'Meath in the Book of Rights', 78. See also Walsh 'Map 2' in *Irish Leaders and Learning through the ages*, 32.

fact, within ten miles of the site of Colmán's foundation.<sup>446</sup> However, while the region in which the majority of property is claimed and tribute noted is indeed local, it may be significant that many of the lands mentioned are not granted by the local kings themselves, but rather by their Clann Cholmáin overlords.

In fact, of the numerous regal figures brought into contact with the saint in his Life, only two kings of Fir Thulach are named: Onchú mac Saráin (§48, 49)<sup>447</sup> and Cú Chaille mac Dublaide (§50).<sup>448</sup> *BCh* does not supplement the historical sources with further deeds of the Fir Thulach dynasty, but unique details regarding property areas and extents, family groupings and placenames are numerous in the text. In order to investigate fully property grants in Fir Thulach land, and their testimony in regard to Lann, episodes concerned with the close relations of Colmán will be examined first, followed by those concerning local secular figures, those involving Clann Cholmáin, and others.

*a) Episodes concerning the close family of Colmán.*

A number of instances in the Life illustrate the connection between Lann and the descendants of Colmán's great-grandfather.<sup>449</sup> These allow us to identify the property supposedly granted to Lann by this family group, to view their role within the institution, and how it viewed them. The relationship depicted is complex at times.<sup>450</sup> It appears appropriate to consider the close relations of Colmán as consisting solely of certain families of Fir Thulach.

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<sup>446</sup> Place-names in *BCh* are detailed to great effect in Walsh's 'Topography of Betha Cholmáin'. I have traced further locations of place-names in *BCh* with the aid of Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, the use of modern maps of the area by Ordnance Survey Ireland, and barony maps of the area taken from the seventeenth-century *Hibernia Regnum* study. For advice on, and access to, the latter, I am indebted to the kindness of the staff at Ordnance Survey Ireland, particularly their archives division.

<sup>447</sup> Attested in the annals, where he is named as one of the retinue of Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine in the seventh century. See AFM s.a. 660

<sup>448</sup> Obit given in AFM s.a. 102. He is also discussed in relation to Clann Cholmáin in chapter 2.3 b).

<sup>449</sup> See McLeod, 'Kinship', 4-6.

<sup>450</sup> The Life also claims that they are both part of Clann Cholmáin and the Fir Thulach. It is unlikely that this has any historical value. See Chapter 1.1, 'Genealogical Information'.

We are told by the Life that the grandfather of Colmán, Leda, had four sons (§8): Anfossaid, Lechet, Cummaíne and Luachán. The lands of these brothers are carefully noted. Anfossaid has property at Clúain Gamnae, today Clongowny, three and a half miles north east of Lann.<sup>451</sup> The descendants of Anfossaid are identified as the Uí Maíl Umai and Uí Mancháin, the former of which are attested in genealogical sources.<sup>452</sup> In the Life (§36), Colmán is refused a gift of land by his uncle, Anfossaid, who proceeds to mock him, resulting in a curse on Anfossaid and his descendants by the saint. Three of Colmán's sisters, Trede, Brógel and Buidnech, are said in *BCh* to relocate to the local church at Clúain Gamnae, which was on lands owned by Anfossaid (§9).

The second of Colmán's uncles, Lechet, settles in Ráith Lechet in Cnámros, and from him are said to be descended the Uí Lechet (§8). Neither this group nor its location, Cnámros, are attested in any sources. As with Anfossaid, Lechet refuses Colmán any property except the site of one house, for which he is duly chastised by the saint (§37). The last of Colmán's uncles, Cummaíne, settles at Ráith Chúanna, or Ráith Chúanna Mór, named after his son, Cúanna (§8).<sup>453</sup> Cummaíne's wife is Bríg, the daughter of the king of Delbna Mór, now approximating to the neighbouring barony of Delvin.<sup>454</sup> Ráith Chúanna must have been in close proximity to Lann, as we are told by the Life that it is situated in the territory of the Meic Airechtaigh, who are named as *airchinnigh* of Lann (§37). It is unsurprising that the forefather of Lann's ecclesiastical officials should display the greatest generosity towards Colmán. He is rewarded with a son, Cúanna, to whom the saint says *biáid cendacht mo chell / is mo thíre teinn / im degaid dot chlaind / cen mebail, cin meing* 'the headship of my churches and my broad land shall be with thy offspring after me, without deceit, without fraud' (§38).

Further information in *BCh* provides insight into the roles of more distant relatives of Colmán. It is recorded that one of Colmán's principal churches to the east of Lann, Léna, was built on land given as a gift by the brothers of his grandfather, the Uí Fhorannáin,

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<sup>451</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 266.

<sup>452</sup> Mac Fhirbhisigh, *Genealogies*, 462.2, here said to be 'Leinster folk'.

<sup>453</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 269.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

descendants of Leda (§43). Though Forannán is identified in the Life here as Leda's son, it is likely that there is confusion with Leda's brother, as it was clearly stated that Luachán, Leda's son, had three brothers, not four (§8). The Uí Fhorannáin were possibly a sept of the Uí Labrada, akin to the Uí Mancháin, the descendants of Colmán's uncle Anfossaid.<sup>455</sup> The Uí Labrada, being a Leinster family, may suggest early Leinster connections with the area. A picture emerges, moreover, which shows the area surrounding Lann to be intricately linked with the families of its patron. This dependency on the locality explains why Lann puts so much emphasis on the repercussions which would befall any who transgress upon the territory.

*b) Episodes concerning local secular figures.*

While Clann Cholmáin are depicted as benefactors of Lann in a number of key instances (§45, 62), local Fir Thulach figures also bequeath lands to the monastic site. While not as extensive as donations supposedly made by the Uí Néill overlords, properties presented by smaller kings and tribes may, in some ways, be more important to Lann. It is also likely that these grants of land may have had some elements of historicity.

Perhaps foremost of these is the foundation of Lann itself. The land on which it is built is donated to Colmán by the dual Uí Dubáin, of the wood, and of the plain (§39), though angelic intervention is recounted to further bolster this claim.<sup>456</sup> This episode demonstrates the hagiographer's detailed knowledge of his locality. Each of the areas of land granted is carefully named, with extra information supplied where possible. We are told, for instance, that Tech Conáin, the house of Conán, descendant of Ailill, from whom are the Cenél

<sup>455</sup> O'Brien, *CGH*, 34, 119 bb 46 and Mac Fhirbhisigh, *Genealogies*, 453.8.

<sup>456</sup> Meyer here translates *fine griein* as 'family of Grian', at Lann, but his glossary to *BCh* identifies *fine griein* as 'family of the land'. A later corrigendum translates it as 'glebal family'. More recent scholarship identifies the *fine griein* as the family group originally in possession of land upon which a church was later built. This family grouping often seems to have had some standing in the local community, probably due to their donation. This would parallel the wider effort on the part of influential rulers of the eleventh and twelfth century to be seen as supporters of a church which would, in turn, bestow celestial favour upon them. This has been discussed previously as part of the discussion on the reforms of the twelfth century at the beginning of 'Section 2'. See also Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam: The Patron Saint of an Irish Church', 275-6. See also Chapter 6.2 'Lann and its Community'.

nAilella of Fir Thulach (§39),<sup>457</sup> is *tech n-abad Colmán meic Luacháin* ‘the house of the abbot of Colmán mac Luachán’ (§41).<sup>458</sup> Ráith Speláin is abundant in acorns (§39, 40). Details such as these suggest that it is very likely that the Life was composed at Lann by someone with a detailed knowledge of the area.

Only one of the small areas mentioned as part of this land grant can be identified in modern nomenclature, Gortín Grogín. This today is Gorteen, about three or four miles south of Lann in Westmeath.<sup>459</sup> An episode which describes how this area acquired its name recounts how the craftsman at Tech Conáin, Annairaid, was in possession of a bull that strayed into a nearby field in which it broke its legs. Annairaid complains to the king of Mide and is given the field as recompense (§41).<sup>460</sup> It is noteworthy that the king who judges on this matter is Máel Sechnaill, though it is unclear whether this is the figure whose death is recorded in 862 or he whose death is recorded in 1022.<sup>461</sup>

The owner of the bull in the foregoing episode is Mac Coisemnaig, the same person whose life Annairaid saved (§40) by means of payment with a gold and silver bridle. Mac Coisemnaig then gives land to Annairaid, equalling the price of the bridle, in payment for his Life (§40).<sup>462</sup> The land is Ráith Speláin, which, we are told, is an area worth twelve cows. It is noteworthy that in these two instances, as with the land donations from the Uí Dubáin, formulaic charter terminology is used,<sup>463</sup> and the author is careful to mention that the lands should be free *ó ríge 7 ó chíss na flatha 7 na túaithe* ‘from king and from tax of chief and of tribe’ (§39).

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<sup>457</sup> O’Brien, *CGH*, 134, 140 a 5.

<sup>458</sup> Further information later in the text (§100) supplies this was also the guesthouse of the church. The Life notes that *táinigc-sim cid íarna éitsecht do foráil a thighi óiged for Airechtach* ‘even after his death he came to commend his guesthouse to Airechtach’.

<sup>459</sup> Walsh, ‘The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*’, 268.

<sup>460</sup> For a discussion on the laws relating to animal-trespass see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 142-144.

<sup>461</sup> AU. This information also serves as valuable dating criteria for the composition of the Life. See Chapter 2.3 ‘The date of *Betha Cholmáin* – internal evidence’, c) *Evidence suggesting a date of at least the eleventh century, but not later than the twelfth century*.

<sup>462</sup> For an introduction to grades of honour-price, and its recompense, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 8, 126.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. Herbert, ‘Charter Material from Kells’, 61-62.

Two Fir Thulach rulers are named in the Life. Onchúmac Saráin grants the saint much tribute. Colmán promised that Onchú would not die until he had administered the last rites to him (§47). When Colmán arrives too late, he miraculously revives Onchú to fulfil his promise (§48). A verse colloquy ensues in which the king describes the marvellous things he has seen in the afterlife (§49-50). Colmán then requests to know what he will be given in return for the miracle *coná rab ar imreson* ‘lest it become a matter of strife’ (§49). The saint is promised detailed tribute, including loaves of bread, a cloak from every warrior, a lump of iron from every smith and a hundred horses for every fosterling. It is noted that these are to be granted to Lann annually. In return, Colmán promises to bless Fir Thulach land and protect it from attacks by both Irish and foreign transgressors. Here the Life reaffirms the role of Lann as a benevolent protector of its community. The price for this protection is tribute from each stratum of society.

The second ruler of Fir Thulach is Cú Chaille mac Dublaide (§50), discussed above. The hagiographer notes of the fortress of Dún na Cairrce that Colmán is still entitled to its tithes, whether it be under the control of the Fir Thulach or the Uí Néill. Nothing further is recorded in *BCh* relating to Cú Chaille.

*BCh* also contains a unique description of what appears to be the ceremonial inauguration of the Fir Thulach kings (§50). The Life records that two population groups were involved: the Uí Thegtacháin and the Uí Domnáin.<sup>464</sup> The ruler of the former is described as being *for in cléith dála 7 an t-escra ana láim* ‘on the hurdle of the assembly, with a cup in his hand’. The Uí Dhomnáin are named as the protective guards of the Fir Thulach kings. The episode may suggest that an abbot or *airchinnech* of Lann would have had a presence in the inauguration ceremonies of local secular rulers, illuminating a close relationship between secular and ecclesiastical centres.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> These groups do not seem to be attested in the genealogical sources.

<sup>465</sup> It has been noted by Katharine Simms that not many contemporary descriptions of inauguration ceremonies exist in literature from before the twelfth century. See *From Kings to Warlords*, 21. On 23, Simms also notes that *BCh* contains an unusual description (§70) of an inauguration-rite for the king of Tara. For further discussion on inauguration ceremonies and the entitlements of kings see Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 21-31; Dillon, ‘On the Date and Authorship of the *Book of Rights*’, 239-249; Dillon ‘Three texts related to the *Book*

## 5.2 Lann and the Uí Néill

*i. an gein bes ullidu escaine Colmáin meic Lúacháin hi lenmain clainni  
Conaill Guthbind ní bíatt hi rígi Temrach.* ‘So long as the curse of Colman  
son of Luachan clings to the race of Conall Guthbinn, they shall not be in  
the Kingship of Tara’ (§73)

While inherently a local text with largely local concerns, attention is paid in no small measure to properties granted by, or claimed from, the southern Uí Néill overlords of Mide, Clann Cholmáin. We have seen that *BCh* provides much information concerning a close relationship between Lann and its local rulers, the Fir Thulach. What was the nature of Lann’s relationship with Clann Cholmáin? The alternative *genealogia vera* of the saint (§4) claims descent from his namesake, Colmán Már, eponymous ancestor to the Mide overlords. Rulers of the Clann Cholmáin appear throughout the Life (§49, 54, 55, 73, 74 etc). Sometimes this presentation is favourable, but at times the hagiographer voices his displeasure. Can these episodes provide evidence of relations between church and dynasty in the twelfth century? What is revealed about the grants of property in *BCh* which are credited to the Mide kings?

In fact, one in ten episodes of the Life concerns property or tribute associated with Clann Cholmáin. The Life paints a vivid picture of the interaction between Saint Colmán and the kings of Mide from Conall Guthbinn (†635) to Domnall mac Murchad (†763).<sup>466</sup> Clann Cholmáin may have been powerful in the midlands during this period, but they did not become the dominant force until the eighth century following the defeat of their rivals, the Síl nÁedo Sláine.<sup>467</sup> Lann, via the Life of its patron, apparently makes claims of wealth and property within a twelfth-century society by placing these claims in a much earlier timeframe, thereby instilling them with authority and credence. In the twelfth century, there seems to have been a distinct pressure on rulers to donate property and wealth to the church if they wished to retain their power.<sup>468</sup> The role of a ruler in society was redefined as one with a clear spiritual element, i.e. that the king held power by the grace of God, and that this grace

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*of Rights*’, 184-192, and Fitzpatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100-1600: a cultural landscape study*.

<sup>466</sup> AU, AFM.

<sup>467</sup> Byrne, ‘Ireland before the battle of Clontarf’, 860.

<sup>468</sup> See Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century*, 196-202.

should be rewarded. The Irish Church sought to capitalise on this perception. Numerous references in the literature and annals note that those rulers who were the builders, protectors and benefactors of churches would be the first to enter heaven along with the saint.<sup>469</sup> Lann also appears to attempt to capitalise on this situation in relation to Clann Cholmáin. To elucidate these matters further, it may be helpful to view each of the Mide kings separately, investigating their presentation in the Life, and their supposed contribution to Lann.

a) *Conall Guthbinn mac Suibne*

In numerous episodes of *BCh* (§54, 55, 58, 59 etc.), Conall Guthbinn is shown to be variously in and out of favour with Colmán. The hagiographer tells us that Conall made significant donations of land and tribute to the saint (§59, 60, 62). Rather than the relationship being portrayed as mutually beneficial, however, the hagiographer indicates that it was more akin to a power struggle between the two figures. It is possible that the relationship depicted between Conall and Colmán reflects some trepidation on the part of Lann regarding its overlords. Episodes relating to Conall are not chronologically consistent. The king is presented as being killed in the Life (§69), only to be reintroduced later to suit the hagiographer's needs (§91).<sup>470</sup> The description of Conall's role in the Life hereafter follows the episodes in sequence, rather than attempting to rationalise the chronology.

Conall is first encountered in *BCh* when an ox is stolen from Conchraid, the bishop of Tír in Dísirt, near Lann (§54). When the ox is retrieved and restored to life, the miracle is attributed to Colmán. The saint asks Conchraid to request the site of a church from Conall. This is granted, and Tech Cholmáin is founded. This church seems minor, and is not one of those noted as Colmán's chief church foundations.<sup>471</sup> The positive nature of this first encounter with Conall does not continue in the Life.

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<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>470</sup> The description of Conall's role in the Life hereafter follows the episodes in sequence, rather than attempting to rationalise the chronology.

<sup>471</sup> See Chapter 4.1 'The *Paruchia* of Lann – Church foundations'.



When a steward of Conall's arrives at the house of Luachán, the father of Colmán, he is dissatisfied with hospitality shown and threatens that Luachán and his family would be drowned or burned unless sufficient food was found for the retinue (§55). Incensed, Colmán causes the steward to be swallowed up by the earth.<sup>472</sup>

Colmán then performs a miracle of food multiplication (§58), paralleling similar episodes in the Life of Brigit,<sup>473</sup> and sends this food to Conall (§59), who attempts to flee, fearful of the power of the saint. After the king prostrates himself, and makes an offering to the saint, Colmán blesses the site of the fortress. This good-will is not long lived. A steward of the Uí Airmedaig, Máelodrán, angers Conall (§64),<sup>474</sup> who orders that he be captured. Colmán, angered, travels with thirteen followers to Conall's fort at Port na hInse. Refused the release of the steward, Colmán predicts that he will nevertheless escape. That evening, Máel Ódrán arrives at Lann and Conall demands the return of his prisoner (§66). An interesting colloquy ensues, in which Colmán promises heaven and the kingship to Conall and his successors, should the king not kill the prisoner. This offer is refused, Conall believing that his kingship was assured without the intervention of the saint. Colmán curses Conall, stating that the kingship would not pass to his descendants,<sup>475</sup> Máelodrán submits to being killed if Colmán promises heaven to his successors. Even though ultimately the prisoner's choice, the death angers Colmán, who causes Port na hInse to sink under the water (§68). Seeking retribution, Conall attempts to kill the saint, but gets lost in a mist, and subsequently killed (§69).

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<sup>472</sup> The episode affords the author an opportunity to include the resulting local curse, *aided Con Mind dot brith* 'May the death of Cú Mend carry you off!'. The author also notes the parallel with an incident in Patrician hagiography. E.g. Flann mac Ónchón is the only person of Conall's retinue to arise from his seat when Colmán enters Conall's fort (§65). This is similar to the arrival of Patrick at Lóegaire Mac Néill's (†463 AU, AI, AFM s.a. 458; CS s.a. 460) fort, when only Dubthach maccu Lugair rises in respect. See Stokes *The Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*, 52. Cf. Erc mac Daeg in Murchú's seventh-century Life of Patrick in Hood, *St. Patrick: his writings and Muirchu's Life*, 90. A similar instance occurs in *Betha Adamnáin*, where Murchad mac Brain rises before Adamnán, while Cellach mac Gerthíde, king of Leinster, and Dub Guail, abbot of Glendalough, remain seated. Murchad later becomes king of Leinster in the text, while Cellach is killed. See Herbert and Ó Riain, *Betha Adamnáin*, 52, §10.

<sup>473</sup> For a discussion on this, and other miracles in *BCh*, see Chapter 6.1 'Relics and Miracles of Colmán and their Function', (a) *Miracles*.

<sup>474</sup> This is chronologically inconsistent, but serves to enhance the narrative. Walsh notes that the Uí Airmedaig were descended from Airmedach (†637), son of Conall Guthbinn. It is therefore impossible that they would have been in existence in Conall's lifetime. See Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 270.

<sup>475</sup> This is historically accurate. More than a century elapses following the death of Conall (†635) before one of his descendants, Domnall, acquires the high-kingship (AU s.a. 743). *BCh* claims that this is due to Murchad, father of Domnall, begging forgiveness from Colmán (§73).

The annals record the killing of Conall Guthbinn by Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine in the house of Nad Fraích's son in 635<sup>476</sup>. *BCh* records that Conall was slain at Tech Nad Fraích in Brega (§69), his killer being Máel Umai mac Forannáin, a monk and kinsman of Colmán.<sup>477</sup> Later in the Life (§91), however, Conall is presented as requesting aid from Colmán against the formidable army of Áed Róin, an Uí Chennsalaig king of Leinster.<sup>478</sup> The relationship between Colmán and Conall is certainly complex.

As regards the areas of property granted to the saint by Conall, after offering the saint a reward for assistance (§60), Colmán chooses land, which the author identified carefully, in details citing property including Bordgal,<sup>479</sup> Lemchaill, Muilenn Dee with its fish-weir, Port na hInse itself and seventeen other estates of land (§59).<sup>480</sup> In addition, detailed tribute is promised by Conall in return for royal success, specifying: *bó cecha gabála duit-si díb-sin 7 ech 7 erriud cecha slúaigidh 7 dechmad cech bíd dogrés sund lais duit* 'you shall have a cow from each capture, a horse and harness from each hosting, and with it tithes of food here always' (§60). Ten areas of land are identified by the hagiographer (§62), leaving seven unnamed. All of these placenames are in Uí Thigernáin, identified by Walsh as forming part of the barony of Moyashel (Magh Asail) and Magheradernan (Machaire ua dTigernáin), situated 'nearly equal distances east and west of Mullingar'.<sup>481</sup> Such identification of the

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<sup>476</sup> AU. This was most likely in revenge for the slaying of Diarmait's brothers by Conall the previous year, recorded by AU s.a. 634.

<sup>477</sup> A figure by the name of Máel Umai is mentioned in the annals alongside Diarmait in the battle of Cúil Caelán, recorded by AU s.a. 635, but this is a Máel Umai mac Óengusso.

<sup>478</sup> For further comments on the chronology of *BCh* see Chapter 3.1-3

<sup>479</sup> The mention of Bordgal and Lemchaill is curious. Both of these, we may assume, are in Uí Thigernáin territory, and thus close to Lann, though both names are now obsolete. Interestingly, there are only two attested instances of Bordgal as a placename that have survived to us. The first is this instance in *BCh*, see Ó Ríain, Ó Murchadha and Murray, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic placenames*, fasc. ii, *bordghal* (2), while the second is to be found in Co. Kilkenny, and is now the parish of Bordwell. See *Historical Dictionary... bordghal* (1), and Carrigan, *The History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory* vol ii, 58-59. This latter example is attested as possibly originally meaning a 'famous assembly place'. See *Historical Dictionary... bordghal* (1) and see also Ní Chatháin, 'Aquitane in Early Irish Sources', 137-146. Meyer, *BCh*, 116, note to line 22 notes that *bordghal* may come from the same root as *Burdigala*, the Latin name for modern Bordeaux, France. It is most likely that the Bordgal mentioned in *BCh* simply refers to a local meeting place or assembly area.

<sup>480</sup> On the significance of the number seventeen (§59, 73), see notes to chapter 4.1 1. a) above.

<sup>481</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 271. He goes on to say that of the proliferation of areas mentioned in the *BCh* identifiable as being in Uí Thigernáin territory only Mullingar itself survives as an attested place-name in modern nomenclature.

extent of Uí Thigernáin territory places Lann and Mullingar at its heart. It may be concluded that the unidentifiable areas are also within a few miles vicinity of the church at Lann.

It appears to be a trend in *BCh* that the hagiographer includes certain details and events which are thematically linked, rather than adhering to a linear chronology.<sup>482</sup> As noted, Conall re-enters *BCh* on the introduction of Áed Róin, king of the Uí Fhailge (§90-1).<sup>483</sup> Conall requests the cleric's aid against Áed in battle.<sup>484</sup> Colmán states that Áed's forces would be disabled if Conall and his smaller retinue were to carry the *bachall* 'staff' of Colmán.<sup>485</sup> The incident also allows the author the opportunity to explain why the staff of Colmán is referred to as *cochlach* 'hooded' (§91). There is also some confusion of figures in this episode. Áed Róin is named as the instigator of the battle (§91), but Áed Dub is later mentioned as being slain at Faithche Meic Mecnán, on the brink of Lough Sewdy.<sup>486</sup> Importantly, additional information is given claiming tribute for Colmán and Lann from the people of Brétach on behalf of Conall (§92).<sup>487</sup>

The overall image of the relationship portrayed between Colmán and Conall mac Suibne is one dominated by the saint. Grants of property or wealth to Colmán and Lann would seem to be the main focus. Investigation into the descendants of Conall will further illuminate the relationship between Lann and the Uí Néill in the twelfth century.

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<sup>482</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3

<sup>483</sup> Áed Róin is attested as holding power in the latter half of the seventh century. See Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 288.

<sup>484</sup> Following this is a passage which describes the battle of Carn Fiachach near the hill of Uisnech. However, the Battle of Carn Fiachach is attested in AU s.a. 765 and is recorded as being fought between Donnchadh and Murchad mac Domnaill, not Áed and Conall. The battle of Cenn Deilgthen in Mide, recorded by AU s.a. 622, in which Conall was victor, may have provided some inspiration.

<sup>485</sup> For a discussion of the role of the staff in *BCh* see Chapter 6.1 Relics and Miracles of Colmán and their Function, (b) *Relics*.

<sup>486</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 267. It may be the case that Áed Dub is simply a scribal error, and that Áed Róin was intended. Unlike other episodes in *BCh*, this is historically inaccurate, though serves the purpose of the narrative. Áed Róin was killed by Áed Gustán, a foster brother of Conall Guthbinn, in the same battle in which Conall slew Áed Sláine, AU s.a. 604.

<sup>487</sup> See O'Brien, *CGH*, 178, 146 b 38.

b) *Murchad mac Diarmaita*

Apart from a passing mention (§49) of the son of Conall Guthbinn, Airmedach (†637),<sup>488</sup> the next figure to merit discussion is the great-grandson of Conall, Murchad (†715) (§73).

Murchad asks of his *anmchara* ‘soul-friend / confessor’, why none of his family have held the Tara kingship for over two generations (§73). He is told by the priest, Cassán, of the curse which Colmán placed upon Conall Guthbinn, which can only be lifted by restoring relations with the saint. Murchad fasts for three days and three nights by way of apology, so that Colmán’s favour is restored to Murchad and his descendants.

c) *Domnall mac Murchada*

Murchad’s son, Domnall, subsequently becomes Uí Néill overking in 743, having wrested power from the Cenél nEógain northerner, Áed Allán.<sup>489</sup> According to *BCh*, Domnall rewards Colmán’s favour with gifts of land, which was to remain free from taxation by his successors ‘until doom’ (§73, 74).<sup>490</sup>

Some of the territories granted by Domnall have been mentioned previously in the Life under different names, e.g. Tulach ind Oiss in Less na Moga (§74), ‘now’ called Ráithín in Pubaill.<sup>491</sup> Of the number of areas of land mentioned as having been gifted by Domnall, some may be identified, or their approximate positions suggested. Raithín na Bréhmaige may be modern Ballynabracky,<sup>492</sup> between Clonard and Kinnegad, thus placing it within ten miles of

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<sup>488</sup> See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 282.

<sup>489</sup> AU.

<sup>490</sup> It is noteworthy that Domnall grants Colmán seventeen territories, similar to the grant made by Conall (§62). Some of the areas named are including both in the grant by Domnall and by Conall. The author thus presents the grant as being reiterated by different generations to emphasise its historicity.

<sup>491</sup> Compare Achaid in Pubaill in Uí Dubáin, so named from the *puball* ‘tent’ of Colmán associated with the area (§41).

<sup>492</sup> Walsh, ‘The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*’, 264.

Lann. Ráithín na Gabann is identified as Rathgowen, located one mile northwest of Mullingar.<sup>493</sup> Less Glinne is in the territory of Uí Dubain,<sup>494</sup> while Cluain Gilli Finnén and Les na hÚamha are likely to be in Uí Fhorranáin.<sup>495</sup> Árd Mór is identifiable with Ardmore, in the barony of Moyashel, along with Leth Cluain, near Clongowny.<sup>496</sup> Ros Omnae is perhaps the furthest afield of those mentioned in this episode (§74), identifiable with modern Rossan, approximately eleven miles from Lann in the barony of Upper Moyfenrath.<sup>497</sup> What is noticeable about this particular grant from Domnall is that while the properties mentioned are all within a few miles of Lann, no discernable pattern is evident, leading to an assumption that the hagiographer sought to band numerous areas claimed by Lann together into one pseudo-official grant, hoping to strengthen the contemporary claim of Lann over them. Together with the grant from Conall (§59), these areas likely form the core of Lann's influence in the midlands.

A final gift from Domnall to Colmán occurs following the return of the saint from a pilgrimage to Rome with his two namesakes, Colmán Elo and Colmán Comraire (§77). Colmán arrives at Drong Fháchnig, identifiable as Knockdrin in the modern-day parish of Castlejordan, County Offaly, about eleven miles south west of Lann,<sup>498</sup> where he receives a visitation from angels. In response, he requests the site from Domnall. The land is granted to him, free from all taxation 'until doom' (§79). The author informs the audience that Colmán left a Briton by the name of Baetán in charge of the church, apparently also identified as Uidren, after whom Cell Uidrín in Ros Omnae (§79) is named. A pedigree given for the latter figure links him to the Cenél nAilella of Fir Thulach.<sup>499</sup> The position of Cell Uidrín, approximately eleven miles south west of Lann, suggests that this church and the one at Drong Fháchnig are very close to each other, possibly the same. Verse reiterating the passage refers to Colmán's deputy as Baetán the Briton (§80).

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<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.* 269.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.* 268.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.* 266.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.* 269.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.* 269.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

<sup>499</sup> O'Brien, *CGH*, 134, 140 a 5.

### 5.3 General remarks concerning Lann, Fir Thulach and the Uí Néill

*Ní dlegar dano do Feraib Tulach cethernn timchill rí Midhi forru...* ‘The king of Meath moreover is not entitled to demand a bodyguard from the Fir Thulach...’ (§101)

*BCh* provides an illuminating detailed description of the rights and tributes accorded to the kings of Mide when resident at Cró-Inis, on the south-western shores of Lough Ennel, about three miles south-west of Lann. This provides insight into the relationship between Lann, its surrounding tribes, and their Uí Néill overlords. As Clann Cholmáin did not assume residency at Cró-Inis until the eighth or ninth century, having moved their residence from the fort at Uisneach,<sup>500</sup> it is likely that these details are reflective of the period of composition for *BCh*.<sup>501</sup> Indeed, Máel Sechnaill II, the Clann Cholmáin king, is recorded as having died on Cró-Inis in 1022.<sup>502</sup>

The Life states: *ní dlegar do Úib Gusán nó d’Óib Tigernán bíathad rí Midhi ‘sin Croindsí acht a Ruba Conaill namá* ‘neither the Uí Gusáin nor the Uí Thigernáin are obliged to provision the King of Mide at Cró-Inis, but in Ruba Conaill only’ (§62). This information suggests that the Mide kings made a *cuairt* ‘circuit’ of their kingdom, stopping at Ruba Conaill (no longer identifiable), at which place they were entitled to request food from the local populace. The Life makes specific mention of *a mairt gemreid nó a mbíad corgais* ‘their winter beef or their Lenten food’ (§62), which appears to have been an important factor in such a *cuairt* in medieval Ireland.<sup>503</sup> The Life goes on to detail the entitlements of the ruler of Uí Ghusáin from any (Clann Cholmáin) group resident at Cró-Inis. These include *cáin a deorad 7 lethcháin urrad ó rí Midhi* ‘the tax of the strangers and half the tax of tribesmen of

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<sup>500</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 87. Cró-Inis was the crannóg residence of the Uí Maél Sechnaill, but their more permanent residence was nearby at Dún na Scíath. Byrne, 143.

<sup>501</sup> For a discussion on the date of composition see Chapters 2.3 and 2.4.

<sup>502</sup> *AFM*.

<sup>503</sup> See Binchy, ‘Aimser Chue’, 18-22, at 20 Binchy notes that “apparently these nobles were entitled to quarter themselves between New Year’s day and Lent on their vassal clients, and to exercise the same privilege for a definite number of friends ... this is a special prerogative of the noble classes over and above their ordinary right to fixed food rents”.

the king of Mide' (§62).<sup>504</sup> The hagiographer carefully adds that the *comarba* of Colmán is entitled to *each 7 erriud cech ríge gebus ríge Uí Tigernán dogrés 7 bith for a lethláim. A meth nó a trucha, mana tarda dó* 'a horse and dress from every king who takes the kingship of Uí Thigernáin always, and to be by his side. Unless he gives him that he shall decay or die early' (§62).

The hagiographer notes further that:

*Ní dlegar dano do Feraib Thulach cethernn timchill ríge Midhi forru acht a gille each an tan bías isin Cróindsí ar son na cethernne timchill 7 ní dlegar díb dol a cath illó catha acht imon ríge 7 deoraid 7 amais.*<sup>505</sup>

'The king of Mide is not entitled to demand a bodyguard from Fir Thulach to accompany him on his round, except a lad for his horses, when he is in Cró-Inis for the purpose of [collecting] the troop to accompany him; and they are not obliged to join a battalion on a day of battle, except around the king and strangers and mercenaries' (§101).<sup>506</sup>

Taking these stipulations into consideration, it seems likely that Lann, and the hagiographer of *BCh*, would not wish to be obliged to offer services to Clann Cholmáin when in lands claimed by Lann. Lann's apparently closely-knit relationship with the Fir Thulach rulers, as demonstrated in *BCh* (§47-9, 65), seems to underpin the limitations of the entitlements of the Mide kings. However, it is also likely to be the case that, should a Clann Cholmáin ruler claim taxes and tribute from these local groups, the ability of Lann to make similar claims over them would be diminished.

<sup>504</sup> The term *urrad* is given under *aurrae* (a) to mean 'a person who is a native within the bounds of a *fine* or *túath* etc'. *DIL*, 'A' col. 483.

<sup>505</sup> The translation of *cethernn timchill* here would perhaps more accurately be 'bodyguard', rather than 'troop'. The *DIL*, 'C' col. 107, has *ceithern* 'a band of fighting men; or collection of persons', while it also notes, under 'T' col. 170, *timchell* 1 (a): an act of going around, surrounding.

<sup>506</sup> Such information may help to expand our knowledge of the entitlements of the Mide kings in the Fir Thulach area. Further entitlements of the kings of Tara are recorded in Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, 94-103.

Further evidence of this is shown in an episode (§50) concerning an eleventh-century king of the Fir Thulach, Cú Cháille mac Dublaide.<sup>507</sup> Regarding the relationship between the Fir Thulach and Clann Cholmáin, the Life states of the stronghold: *rosáraiged uimpi .i. a athrígad nó a dílsiugad do rígain Midi .i. isísín cét ben díb ruc hí* ‘so that it [Dún na Cairce] was outraged, that is to say, its king was dethroned and the place forfeited to the queen of Meath; for she is the first woman that took it’. Following this incident, it is possible that the Fir Thulach were not as amenable to the Úa Máel Sechnaill kings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, though their relationship persisted and their anger evidently abated.<sup>508</sup> Moreover, the hagiographer is swift to note here that, regardless of the ruling group which has possession of the fort, they are still obliged to pay tribute to Lann, as Colmán had blessed the fort in the first place (§50).

A number of other property areas, noted in *BCh* as being in Fir Thulach territory, seem exclusive to Lann, without reference either to the Fir Thulach rulers or to Clann Cholmáin. The land on which Colmán is born is named as *Tír Cholmáin* (§10). Naming policies appear to claim locations for Lann. *Adrad Inge Luacháin*, the Worship of Luachán’s Daughter, named after the sister of Colmán, Mong Dub, is noted as being half way between Craeb Ullan and Lann (§17). This area would not have been more than a mile or so from Lann. The numerous place-names in *BCh*, located in the Uí Thigernáin area,<sup>509</sup> seem to reflect the close relationship between Lann and this population group. Ethgén, son of Tigernán, their ancestor, brought his daughter, Ronat, to study with the saint (§63).<sup>510</sup> The Life recounts that Ronat is buried in the church of Uí Mhuca, claimed for Colmán *ó griun co nem* ‘from ground to sky’ (§63), contributing a bushel of each type of corn once a year at Lent. The consequences of not paying this yearly tribute to Lann are some of the more severe mentioned in *BCh*, the saint stating: *Antí díb so impóbas oram-sae, ní bía uáid nech a rígi a tuáithe co bráth 7 iffrind is gardius saegail dó’ ... ‘Ní raib uáid acht cairem 7 cirmaire nó*

<sup>507</sup> See also chapter 2.3 b).

<sup>508</sup> In 1144 Conchubair, son of Toirdelbach Úa Conchubair, who had been given the kingship of Westmeath by his father, king of Connacht, was killed by the Fir Thulach king, Úa Dublach. The annals record that Conchubair was killed *uair ba rí eachtair-cheneóil lais a bheith-siomh i rígha uas Fearaibh Midhe* ‘for he [Úa Dublach] considered him a stranger in sovereignty over the men of Meath’. See Walsh, ‘The Ua Maélechlainn kings of Meath’, 171.

<sup>509</sup> Further to those mentioned in this section, see Walsh ‘The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*’, 263-272.

<sup>510</sup> Tigernán himself is noted in the episode as the son of Áed Sláne. However, Cf. O’Brien, *CGH*, 135, 140 a 45, where Tigernán is named as a son of Máel Dúin, son of Áed Allán.



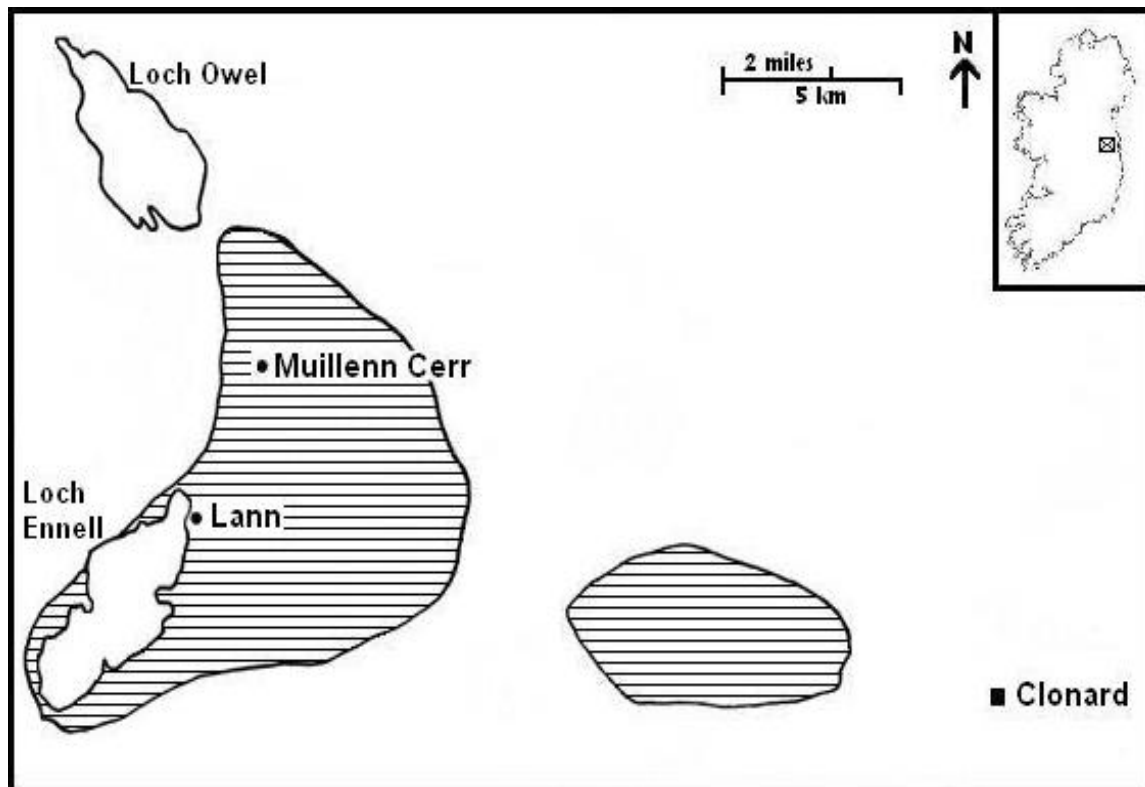
*nech bed fíu íad* ‘any one of them [the Uí Thigernáin] that shall turn on me, he shall have no issue to be kings of his tribe till Doom, and hell and shortness of life to him... [and have] none spring from him but shoemakers and comb-makers, or people of that kind’ (§63). This suggests a low regard for minor craftsmen within Lann’s contemporary society.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Compare the curse of the poet Eochaid on Mongán when the latter convinces his people to mock the poet’s learning. Eochaid says *Níon bia acht eachbachlaich uait!* ‘There will be only stable-boys from you!’ See Knott. ‘Why Mongán was Deprived of Noble Issue’, 155-158.

## 5.4 Extent of the Influence of Lann

*dorat saeire co bráth dia muindtir eter na cella afus cona muindtir ⁊ na cella a nÚib Forannán co lucht a fognama tair .i. secht mbale déc ⁊ na trí cella fil indtib do Cholmán.* ‘And he gave freedom till Doom to his people, both to the churches here, with their people, and to the churches in Uí Fhorannáin, with their folk of service in the east, i.e. seventeen steadings, and (he gave) the three churches that are in them to Colmán’ (§45)



*Map 7: Likely extent of the influence of Lann in the twelfth century*

*BCh* notes that the majority of property areas over which Lann seems to have had historical claim are granted by either the local population groups of Fir Thulach or by the Mide overlords, the Uí Néill. These property grants are closely investigated previously in Chapter 5, though an overview here follows for our current purposes.

While there are property interests in parts of the country other than the midlands (§19), the vast majority of places and population groups mentioned in *BCh* appear to be located within a radius of about twelve miles. The majority of these may be located within a more limited radius. The most frequently mentioned place-names are generally to be found about three or four miles from Lann. The instances in *BCh* which show the most detailed topographical knowledge are those most likely to reflect actual property holdings. Conversely, claims to large areas of land or country-wide tribute are unlikely to have credence, and may be little more than hagiographic convention. Lann appears to have had core areas of influence. The first seems to have stretched from just north of Mullingar to include Lough Ennel, and extended some four or five miles to the east of the lake. The second area appears to be about ten miles to the east of Lann, and may be considered a satellite community of the main church. The associated church sites of Léna, Less Dochuinn and Cell Bec were located here.

If the property concerns of *BCh* appear to be distinctly local, wider concerns are reflected in episodes which deal with the local secular rulers and their overlords. There appears to have been some measure of bias towards the local kings, while simultaneously portraying a generally cordial relationship with the Uí Néill overlords. Details in the Life, together with the formulaic terminology used to claim some property areas, suggest that the Life was composed during the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century. It seems likely that Lann, in its contemporary environment, may have been the most influential church in some areas of Uí Thigernáin, Uí Dubáin and Uí Fhorannáin territories in Fir Thulach. If this is so, it is likely that Lann would have wished to protect its holdings from Clann Cholmáin overlords, members of whom had transgressed on such lands previously (§50). To these ends, the hagiographer sometimes provides a list of legal restrictions of the Mide kings, though it is difficult to assess whether these have any validity. Lann is thus portrayed as an institution offering some protection to its local secular rulers via the Life of its patron, but also defending its own interests.

## Chapter 6 – Lann in its Local Community

Lann has been seen to claim alliance with powerful secular ruling dynasties and ecclesiastical institutions, but is this picture accurate? The ruling groups and influential churches may have been aware of Lann, but it seems unlikely that the church functioned in more than a local sphere. How did Lann function within this community? It will be shown below that *BCh* provides unique information regarding local family groups within about an eleven or twelve mile radius of Lann. What else might the text reveal about the role of Lann as an inextricable element within a medieval community? By elucidating the role of relics and miracles mentioned in the text, some conclusions may be drawn regarding these issues. It seems likely that pilgrimage to the church was of greater importance than taking the remains of the saint on a *cuairt*. This is doubtless due to Lann's limited area of influence. Miracles associated with the saint and his relics also serve to promote the saint and his church among the local population groups, and to remind those groups of their tributary obligations to Lann.

Finally, based on all the available evidence, a history of Lann may be constructed to show a small church as an active force within its community for the better part of a thousand years, thus adding to our knowledge of the Irish microcosmic medieval ecclesiastical centre, how it functioned, and how it survived.

## 6.1 Relics and Miracles of Colmán and their Function

### a) *Miracles*

*Cía clérech dano da fil muilenn cerr do chum achta a mírbuile acht éissium? Cía clérech dano dorigine cruthnecht don eorna acht éisium a aenar namá?* ‘Again, what other cleric is there for whom by his miraculous power a mill was turned awry but he? What cleric again made wheat out of barley but he only?’ (§103)

The miraculous forms a central part of any hagiographical work. The saint, invested with divine power, performs holy acts of various types, and with differing results. Miracles are a key element in the saint’s career, constituting a large part of the hagiographical claim of sanctity for its subject. Thaumaturgic occurrences allow the saint to be elevated above and beyond the level of his or her lay brethren, leading to reverence, sanctity and eventually, in many cases, the composition of a Life which records the ‘biography’ of the saint, with validating miracles.<sup>512</sup> The wonders attributed to Saint Colmán may be divided into two main categories: those that magnify the holy qualities of the saint, and those which are used to claim wealth and property. Some phenomena seek to achieve both ends. There are some thirty miraculous instances recorded in *BCh*, some of which are performed directly by the saint (§15, 55, 64 etc), and some which are attributed to him but do not directly involve his presence (§93, 94, 95). The former category contains the great majority of the miracles, woven into the text throughout the narrative of the saint’s Life. The latter occur at the end of the text, and, because they do not require the presence of the saint, are likely to be either a reflection of traditions associated with the saint, or fabrications by the author. *BCh* is book-ended by homiletic passages expounding the sanctity and piety of Colmán.<sup>513</sup> Such a focus is also in evidence in miracles-tales. Early-life miracles (§10, 13, 15) are unconcerned with wealth or secular issues. The same may be said of final miracles of association. Those miraculous narratives central to the saint’s career more closely show the concerns of twelfth-century Lann.

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<sup>512</sup> Compare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer*, 228-248.

<sup>513</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3.

It has been noted by Clare Stancliffe<sup>514</sup> that miracles recorded closer to the death of the saint have an ecclesiastical character, while Lives composed at a remove from the saint's lifetime contained 'a far higher proportion of folk-lore type miracles'. Máire Herbert has noted something similar in relation to Colum Cille.<sup>515</sup> Herbert maintains that, in the majority of cases, miracles performed on Iona demonstrate no 'spectacular *miracula*', while those performed away from the island depict their subject in the light of a folk-hero. While Stancliffe and Herbert were writing about seventh-century Lives, might the same also be true of *BCh*? It has been discussed that a corpus of earlier material relating to Colmán is possible,<sup>516</sup> and that this is likely to have contained a more 'muted thaumaturgical element'. It may be difficult to identify the individual cases in which the hagiographer of *BCh* is drawing on folklore motifs for his wondrous occurrences, and those for which he uses biblical sources. Stancliffe also notes the general knowledge of Irish hagiographers of apocryphal works,<sup>517</sup> and how these may provide further inspiration for miraculous narratives in Irish hagiography. Might these have been a factor in *BCh*? The following table outlines the miraculous occurrences in the Life, and their outcome. It seems useful to divide the miracles according to their function, rather than by theme.<sup>518</sup> Two main functions, or categories, will be shown: 'vertical' miracles 'which illustrate the saint's relationship with the divine sphere'<sup>519</sup> and 'practical' or 'horizontal' miracles, 'where the effect of the miracle is felt in very real terms in this human existence on earth'.<sup>520</sup> As a key theme in *BCh* seems to be the acquisition of wealth and property, instances which involve such acquisition will be highlighted.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints' Lives', at 93.

<sup>515</sup> See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 15-16.

<sup>516</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3.

<sup>517</sup> Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints' Lives', 91. E.g: the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Peter*. See McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, 7-9.

<sup>518</sup> This follows the analysis of Stancliffe, as per her 'The Miracle Stories...' article at 95, who drew on the work of J.L. Derouet, who discussed a number of late Merovingian *vitae* in his unpublished PhD thesis: *Recherches d'Histoire des mentalités sur les texts hagiographiques du nord et des l'est de la Gaule, VII<sup>e</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 44-50 and tables on 439-442. Stancliffe also draws on Derouet's article 'Les possibilités d'interprétation sémiologique des texts hagiographiques', 153-162.

<sup>519</sup> Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints' Lives', 94.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.* 94-95.

<sup>521</sup> Compare Clare Stancliffe's divisions of the miracles of St. Martin of Tours. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer*, 365-371.

Fig. 11 – Miracles in *BCh*

Vertical Miracles	Chapter §	Details
	10	Choirs of angels sing at the saint's baptism
	12	Angelic song and sweet smelling herbs follow the young saint
	13	The saint spends a day and a half under water, like the apostle Paul
	29	The angel Victor tells Colmán where to build Lann
	84	Angels run races for the saint and his monks
Practical Miracles	Chapter §	Details
	15	Saint's cure of abdominal disease
	16	Saint's cure of blindness
	20	Saint's feeding of lepers
	25/26	Saint raises son of the king of Fermoy from the dead.
		<b>Wealth and property are granted</b>
	27	The tongue-less bell of Motura rings
	46	The <i>bachall</i> of Colmán renders cows immobile
	41	The saint drives demons out from the land
		<b>Property is granted</b>
	44/45	Saint's cure of Domnall mac Áed, king of Ireland
		<b>Property and tribute are granted</b>
	A. Helping Miracles	48/49
		The saint's bell is used to bring Onchúmac Saráin back to life
		<b>Tribute is granted</b>
	50	The <i>bachall</i> of Colmán creates a holy well
		<b>Tribute is demanded</b>
	51	The saint saves lambs from wolves
		<b>Tribute is demanded</b>
	55	An ox is brought to life
		<b>Property is granted</b>
	58	The saint provides much food from very little

	59	The saint restores the fort of Conall Guthbinn <b>Property is granted</b>
	61	The <i>findfaídech</i> is sent from heaven to Colmán <b>The church at Úachtor Comartha is claimed as free from tax</b>
	85	The saint dispels a swarm of wasps
	86/87	The saint is invoked to aid a trysting party <b>Tribute and property are granted</b>
	93	Mariners aided by praying to the saint
	94	Warrior aided by the spittle of the saint
	95	Warrior aided by praying to the saint
<b>B. Punishment</b>	55	The earth swallows up a steward
<b>Miracles</b>	68	The saint calls upon God to destroy Port na hInse
	56	The saint reverses the grinding of a Mill
<b>C. Vindication</b>	64	The saint causes waters to part
<b>Miracles</b>	69	A heavenly mist protects the saint

About one third of the miracles in the Life lead to a claim of property or wealth on the part of Lann. It seems clear that while such acquisition of wealth and property by, or on behalf of, the saint, may constitute an overall focus of the Life, it is not the sole outcome of miracle-working. The ratio of ‘vertical’ occurrences to ‘practical’ counterparts is 1:6. The ‘vertical’ miracles occur towards the beginning and end of the text, apparently to confer a holy authority on the saint. By far the largest category of thaumaturgic occurrence is the helping miracle, which constitutes nearly half of all wondrous instances in the Life. That all instances of claims to wealth are contained in this category cannot be coincidence. The hagiographer seems to infer that in order to benefit from the miraculous intercession of the saint, some payment is required. Examples of *miracula* which seem directly based on



biblical events (§13,<sup>522</sup> 20,<sup>523</sup> and 58<sup>524</sup>) do not include a claim to wealth, and seem wholly to magnify the authority of Colmán, consolidating the saint's status and power. However this authority pervades throughout the Life, lending support to episodes more concerned with secular matters. There are only two episodes of 'punishment' displays of power in *BCh* (§55, 68). These seem to be important to the narrative of the text, dealing with one of the central royal figures in the Life, Conall Guthbinn. Through these episodes, the audience of *BCh* is reminded subtly that to transgress against the saint, or Lann, would be to invite the displeasure of a powerful and influential figure. The third category of 'practical' miracles is that of 'vindication'. Stancliffe adds this category to Derouet's model, noting that 'Sometimes it is simply the holy man himself who is revealed as a man of power, or remains unharmed; but nearly always there is an underlying – if not overt – sense in which the holy man is on trial, and his victory is a victory for Christianity'.<sup>525</sup> This appears to be the case in *BCh*. In the three miraculous events which seem suited to this category (§56, 64, 69), Colmán is shown to overcome an obstacle through divine intervention without necessarily punishing or rewarding another party. These instances further impress the saint's status as powerful figure upon the audience of the text.

To further elucidate the role of thaumaturgic instances in *BCh*, it is helpful to discuss more specifically themed categories. Miracles of healing and revitalisation are found only sporadically in *BCh*. Those at the beginning and end of the Life are, unsurprisingly, formulaic, while those in the body of the Life are associated with tribute or property claims. Early in *BCh*, Colmán heals his maternal grandfather, Caech Rolach, from blindness and an abdominal disease (§15, 16).<sup>526</sup> A man immobilised after battle is cured by the spittle of Colmán (§94), though the Life does not explain if the spittle was a traditional relic of the saint. Verse which commemorates the event is said to have particular healing qualities upon

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<sup>522</sup> Colmán's day and night under water is similar to 2 Corinthians, xi, 25: 'a night and a day have I been in the deep' and 26: '... in perils of waters... in perils in the sea'. Also Cf. O'Keeffe, 'Mac Dá Cherdda and Cummaine Fota', 21.

<sup>523</sup> The relationship with lepers reminds us of numerous instances in the Bible, e.g.: Matthew viii 1 - 4; Mark i 40 - 45; Luke xvii 11 - 16, though it is to be noted that Colmán, unlike Jesus, does not heal the lepers of Lismore.

<sup>524</sup> A reflection of Mark vi 41 - 44 but also similar to traditions associated with Brigit e.g. Ó hAodha, *Bethu Brigitte*, §12, 21.

<sup>525</sup> Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints' Lives', 97.

<sup>526</sup> Cf. Ó hAodha, *Bethu Brigitte*, 8-9 §24-27.

payment of a *screpul* to Colmán, or, by extension, to Lann (§95). Other instances of miracles which aid the layman in *BCh* (§93, 95) do not make reference to wealth. A mariner and a warrior praying to Colmán receive assistance. These miracles seem to serve the purpose of enhancing the spiritual character of saint. The most spectacular healing miracles are the resuscitations of Dúngal mac Máel Fhothbil (§25) and Onchú mac Saráin (§49). In the case of Dúngal, a gift of one hundred and fifty cows, as well as land upon which to build a church, is made to Colmán. Cell Uird, near Fermoy, is built there. The revitalisation of Onchú is followed by a lengthy colloquy detailing consequent tribute from the local Fir Thulach rulers and people.<sup>527</sup> Colmán is also said to have cured the king of Ireland, Domnall mac Áedo,<sup>528</sup> from a foot infection (§44). The location in which the cure occurred, Dún Léime ind Eich, is granted to Lann, along with seventeen other estates of land (§45). The penalty for its taxation by any future king is a hundred-fold loss of the tax exacted.

Angelic figures are found throughout *BCh*. Of most note is Victor, who first appears to Colmán to offer instruction on the foundation of Lann (§29). The angel also recites a poem of praise for the saint (§30) which offers its audience the promise of salvation through burial in the cemetery of Lann, which is surrounded by *buidne d'angli* 'hosts of angels'. Angels singing around the saint are elsewhere mentioned (§10, 18, 31, 32, 41 etc). A choir of angels appears each Sunday in Tech Conáin, residence of the *comarba* of the saint, which holds the relic of Colmán's thumb (§41). Lann is thus claiming both angelic affinity for its patron and contemporary angelic presence. References to Victor in particular are reminiscent of Patrician traditions. Indeed, one section of *BCh* (§29) may be influenced directly by episodes in the Tripartite Life.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.1-3.

<sup>528</sup> Obit in AU s.a. 642.

<sup>529</sup> Most striking of these similarities are the direct references to Victor, and Colmán's conversations with other angels. Victor is the only angelic figure named directly in *BCh*. The figure also appears numerous times in Stokes, *Tripartite Life of Patrick*, e.g. 28, 62, 252. The episode on 252 is quite reminiscent of §29 of *BCh*. In both instances the angel refers the saint to an alternate location, ultimately to be his principal church. For further instances of the relationship between Victor and Patrick see 'The Life of Patrick' in Stokes, *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, 153, 155, 166. On the matter of the saint's conversations with angels, compare Stokes, *Tripartite Life of Patrick*, 206 in which the saint converses with a different angel each day, sharing knowledge, and *BCh* §18 in which angels also converse with the young Colmán.

The majority of examples of angelic visitation in the Life appear at the beginning and end. Angels welcome the saint upon his birth (§10) in a manner, we are told, reminiscent of Christ. Angels converse with the saint during his time spent with Mochuda (§17). Towards the end of the Life, some of the examples of angelic visitation serve more secular ends. It is claimed that a service of angels was revealed to Colmán at Drong Fháchnig and he begs the area from the current king, Domnall mac Murchad, who grants it to Colmán free of taxation (§79). This area represents lies at outer limits of Lann's estimated zone of influence, being identified by Walsh as Knockdrin Parish, Co. Offaly, approximately eleven miles south west of Lann.<sup>530</sup> The Life shows that angels were not only conversing with Colmán, but performing more physical tasks also. To relieve his monk's dejection at missing the fair of Tailtiu, angels appear from heaven and run races for their amusement (§84). The location at the cross near Adrad Motura and Cross na Truma is said to have been renamed Aenach Laindi in memory of the event. At the end of *BCh* the saint is said to depart from life *etir na himacallma anglecda 7 na cumsanta díada* 'among angelic conversations and divine repose' (§106). *BCh* recounts that *iss ed sin immurgu indisitt na senchusa naema nách do galar sainruthach etir atbath, acht aingil an Choimded tancatar día thogairm i forba a bethad* 'this is what the holy ancient lore relates, that he did not die of a special disease at all, but angels of the Lord came to summon him at the end of his life' (§106). Mention of 'holy ancient lore' may suggest an earlier tradition of the saint, but may also be convention.<sup>531</sup>

Some of the relics and miracles of the saint are imprinted as features of the landscape surrounding Lann, serving as a constant reminder of the presence of the saint in the daily lives of the local populace. None of the events of the Life serve this purpose moreso than the miracle which gives the settlement of Mullingar its name. In this episode (§56), Colmán, at a mill to grind corn into flour, finds the steward of Conall Guthbinn, king of Meath, there before him. He requests that the steward cease, as he is in great haste, but the steward refuses. Colmán proposes that God will decide the outcome. The steward agrees, presumably knowing that the mill can only grind in the direction of his corn. The mill grinds backwards

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<sup>530</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 267.

<sup>531</sup> Herbert notes that 'vernacular law counts "godly old writings" among seven things which facilitate legal decision'. See Herbert, 'Property Records in pre-Anglo-Norman Ireland', 108. This may indicate that the hagiographer of *BCh* is investing his claims to Colmán's sanctity with authority by situating them in an earlier tradition.

against itself, and flour is produced on Colmán's side. On the side of the steward, the corn is turned into barley. That place becomes known henceforth as *Muilenn Cerr* 'the Crooked Mill', anglicised Mullingar. This miracle does not include a claim of wealth, though it is evident that Lann is asserting its position with regard to kings of Conall's line.

Some miracles in *BCh* seem to be directly borrowed from folklore motifs. They are found especially at the end of the Life, and may represent an attempt to include all known traditions of the saint that did not fit the main body of the text.<sup>532</sup> The king of Uí Fhailge, Cináed, is assisted by Colmán in escaping from the wrathful king of Meath, with whose wife he was engaged in an affair (§86). Cináed leaves his horse under the protection of Colmán, while his accompanying steward leaves his horse under the protection of Óengus mac ind Óc. The horse of the steward is stolen by thieves, while that of Cináed remains safe. While being pursued, Cináed prays to Colmán, and he, his druid, the queen and her handmaiden escape by being transformed into deer.<sup>533</sup> Later, Cínaed promises much tribute to the saint by way of thanks (§87). The events are reiterated in the following verse passage (§88). This deserves some comment, as it may provide valuable insight into the political and ecclesiastic viewpoint of Lann in the twelfth century. While Colmán does not actively perform the miracle allowing the unfaithful couple to escape retribution, he seems to sanction the intervention, and has no qualms about accepting tribute in gratitude. This would seem to reflect the attitude of an unreformed church in the twelfth century. The reform movement of the early twelfth century centred on Munster, and subsequently Armagh, was quite vocal about unfaithfulness to the bonds of marriage, as witnessed by the letters of the Canterbury Archbishops, Lanfranc and Anselm, to the Munster kings of Cashel.<sup>534</sup> Flanagan notes that, by the twelfth century, Irish marriage customs contravened canon law in three ways. Of the reform movement, she states: 'Marriage was seen as the distinctive feature of the lay order

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<sup>532</sup> See Chapter 3.1-3.

<sup>533</sup> While the transformation of the king and queen into deer is not necessarily a pagan/folklore motif, the inclusion of a petition to Óengus mac ind Óc appears to be. *BCh* stresses that such a petition is powerless when compared with a prayer to Saint Colmán, thus the saint is championing the cause of Christianity. Compare Saint Martin's halt of a pagan funeral in the name of God in Fontaine, *S. Severus, Vie de Saint Martin*, vol I, 278.

<sup>534</sup> Lanfranc, writing to Toirdelbach Ua Briain in 1074, said that 'it is reported that in your kingdom a man will abandon his lawfully wedded wife at his own will, without any canonical process taking place'. Anselm, writing, somewhat later, to Toirdelbach's son, Muirchertach Ua Briain, said 'It is said that men exchange their wives as freely and publicly as a man might exchange his horse'. See Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 6 and 7 respectively.

and concern for its correct observance proceeded in parallel with the definition of the duties of the clergy'<sup>535</sup>. *BCh* indicates that the *airchinnech* of Lann had a wife (§28). Such information allows us to conclude that Lann remained largely unreformed at the time of the Life's compilation, and was generally more concerned with secular, rather than spiritual, issues.

### **b) Relics**

*Atát immurgu a taisi hi fos co lléic isna talmandaib co n-onóir 7 co n-ermitin.* 'His relics, however, are still here upon the earth with honour and veneration.' (§2)

The Life documents the patron's sanctity, and the extent of the property over which Lann claimed influence and tribute. It also seeks to present Lann as keeper of the corporeal and associative relics of the saint, and thereby as a destination for pilgrims. Miracles in *BCh* often leave behind a testimony in the community. At times, miraculous power is conveyed through an item belonging to, or associated with, the saint. Numerous types of relic are mentioned in *BCh*. Light may be shed on the purpose of the saint's artefacts by examining the situations in which they are mentioned, and by investigating how these vestiges commemorate the saint. On the whole, there seem to be two modes of use recorded by the author. The first is wholly religious in nature, artefacts of the saint being associated with healing or protective miracles. The second, and by far the more common category, describes the indirect use of these items insofar as secular gains, property and tribute are often demanded or granted freely as a result of miracles effected by the use of relics, or indeed by reason of their very presence within the community. Two main categories of relic are to be found in the Life: associative (including those claimed to have been a possession of the saint) and corporeal (his earthly remains).<sup>536</sup> Likewise, varying categories of artefact-associated miracles are in evidence. Through detailed examination of each, some conclusions may be advanced regarding the hagiographer's reasons for devoting approximately a third of the text to narratives concerning the antiquities of Colmán.

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<sup>535</sup> Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, 184.

<sup>536</sup> For a good introduction to the role of relics in the local community see Edwards, 'Celtic Saints and Early Medieval Archaeology', 225-227.

It is possible that an earlier corpus of material was available to the author.<sup>537</sup> Part of this corpus would undoubtedly have contained references to the relics of the saint, informed by local tradition. Evidence in *BCh* suggests that a number of traditions originated in the community at Lann. However, in certain cases, further investigation suggests a borrowing of, or confusion with, traditions associated with other saintly figures, most notably Colmán Elo. This may be quite obvious, such as the claim over the tongue-less bell of Motura/ Mochuda (§27), and the hooded staff, or *bachall*, of Colmán Elo (§83, 91). In other cases a higher degree of subtlety is evident. Comparison with other saints' Lives may provide a key to identifying the significance of these artefacts.

## 1) Corporeal Relics

### 1.1 The Shrine of Colmán

Corporeal relics in reliquaries were esteemed across the Christian world.<sup>538</sup> In an Irish context, exhumation and enshrinement of the saint's remains are mentioned as having been carried out in the cases of Saint Comgall of Bangor,<sup>539</sup> Saint Flannan and Saint Columba of Terryglass,<sup>540</sup> while Colmán Elo appeared after his death in a vision and ordered that his bones be disinterred '*ne ulterius absconderentur in terra*'.<sup>541</sup> While these examples are earlier than the likely date of composition of *BCh*,<sup>542</sup> they suggest that the practice was well known by the twelfth century.

Evidence in the Life (§96) states that the monks of Colmán begged the dying saint to allow them to unearth his relics, *a mbith i scrín cumdachta eturru amail cach ardaem 7 cach n-ardapstal archena fo Éirinn* '[that] they might be kept among them in an adorned shrine like [the relics of] every other great saint and chief apostle throughout Ireland'. This is agreed to

<sup>537</sup> For discussion on the possibility of an earlier Life of Colmán see Chapter 3.1-3.

<sup>538</sup> Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages*, 5.

<sup>539</sup> Plummer, *VSH* ii, 21.

<sup>540</sup> Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi*, 232, 299.

<sup>541</sup> Plummer, *VSH* i, 273.

<sup>542</sup> See Chapter 2.4, '*The Date of Betha Cholmáin – Linguistic Evidence*'.

by the saint. Meyer's introduction to *BCh* notes that, in the Rennes manuscript, an additional note follows the conclusion of the main text of the Life, 'written in a fine bold hand of perhaps the fourteenth or fifteenth century'.<sup>543</sup> This states that the shrine of Colmán had been at Lann from the time of Domnall mac Murchado (†763),<sup>544</sup> but was hidden upon the arrival of the Viking Turgéis and his army in the ninth century.<sup>545</sup> The scribe goes on to say that the shrine was later unearthed under the reign of Murchad Úa Máel Sechnaill, deposed in 1125,<sup>546</sup> and a new shrine was created for the relics by Gillacríst Úa Mocháin the craftsman. While the fourteenth or fifteenth-century copyist of the Life may be uncertain about the concealment of the shrine, numerous examples of this practice are in evidence from the Viking period.<sup>547</sup> The subsequent unearthing of the shrine is attested in the annals as occurring in the year 1122.<sup>548</sup> Some two and a half centuries later, it is recorded that Lann and its relics were burned by Murchertach Óg Mac Eochagáin.<sup>549</sup> This evidence, together with Meyer's dating of the scribal hand in the manuscript, suggests that the surviving manuscript copy of the Life may have been made as a response to the destruction of the church and its relics.<sup>550</sup>

As regards the unearthing of the shrine in 1122, it was not uncommon in the eleventh and twelfth-century period to exhume the remains of a saint and place them in a new shrine,<sup>551</sup> a practice for which evidence exists by the ninth century.<sup>552</sup> In the twelfth century there appears

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<sup>543</sup> *BCh*, introd. v. For further discussion on this addition to the text, see Chapter 2.1 'Rennes MS 598 – Overview', and Chapter 6.3, 'A History of Lann meic Luachán'.

<sup>544</sup> AU.

<sup>545</sup> Turgéis is noted as arriving on Loch Rí, today Lough Ree, in AU s.a. 845. This notes that the army plundered Connacht and Mide, burning Clonmacnoise, Terryglas, Clonfert and other churches. It is unsurprising that Lann felt it necessary to conceal the relics of their patron at such a time.

<sup>546</sup> AU, AFM, CS.

<sup>547</sup> See Herbert, 'Crossing historical and literary boundaries', 87-101, especially at 90-3.

<sup>548</sup> AU, ALC, AFM.

<sup>549</sup> MIA s.a. 1394.

<sup>550</sup> For further commentary on the history of the Life and the Rennes MS in which it survives see Chapter 2.1 'Rennes MS 598 – Overview', and Chapter 2.2 – Betha Cholmáin – Paleographical Features'.

<sup>551</sup> Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics and Reliquaries in Ancient Ireland', 11-12.

<sup>552</sup> The relics of the first bishop of Kildare, Conlaed, were placed in a shrine in 800 (AU); the relics of Rónán mac Beraig were placed in a gold and silver shrine, see AU s.a. 801. A Viking raid on Bangor is noted as shaking the relics out of their shrine, where they may have resided for some time beforehand. See AU, AFM s.a. 824. Furthermore, a gloss from about 800 refers to Tasach, craftsman of Saint Patrick *toesach dorat cumtach for bachall Ísu* 'who first put a case on the staff of Jesus'. See Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* ii, 319.

to have been renewed emphasis on having the relics of a patron saint on display to enhance the merit of a church seeking greater ecclesiastical status or secular patronage. The influential community of Kells had the *Cathach*, or battle-psalter, of its patron Colum Cille enshrined in the eleventh century with twenty-seven ounces of silver apparently donated by the northern Cenél Conaill branch of the Uí Néill,<sup>553</sup> the saint's kin.<sup>554</sup> The annals also record numerous instances of the exhumation and enshrining of saints' remains in the twelfth century e.g.: Saints Mennán and Cummaíne Foda of Clonfert, Co. Galway (1162)<sup>555</sup> and Saint Commán of Roscommon (1170).<sup>556</sup> In an area of the midlands, so heavily populated with monastic centres that it acquired the name *Fir Chell* 'men of the churches', rather than its earlier name of Uí Fhiachach,<sup>557</sup> competition for influence and patronage must have been intense. An impressive reliquary or shrine would have been an asset to a ecclesiastical centre wishing to attract pilgrims and donations to the site. It is not impossible that, following the new enshrinement at Kells, Lann may simply have followed a trend in refocusing on the remains of its patron.

The fourteenth/fifteenth-century scribal post-script to *BCh* suggests that the shrine of the saint was not discovered, but rather unearthed from a hiding-place, in which it evaded Viking destruction.<sup>558</sup> Was the shrine forgotten about after being secreted away from the marauders? Did twelfth-century Lann seek to re-evaluate its incomes and influence, and re-define itself, through reinstatement of the saint's shrine and production of an accompanying Life of its patron in a changing political and ecclesiastical context? The Life documents the patron's sanctity, and the extent of the property over which Lann claimed influence and tribute. It also seeks to present Lann as keeper of the corporeal and associative relics of the saint, and therefore as a destination for pilgrims.

The post-script to *BCh* mentions the resident craftsman at Lann, Giolla Críst Úa Mocháin, which recalls Annairaid in *BCh* (§40, 41), also resident craftsman of Lann, and suggests a

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<sup>553</sup> ATig s.a. 1090; Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 92-93.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.* 310.

<sup>555</sup> AFM; Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages*, 7.

<sup>556</sup> AFM.

<sup>557</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 93, 225.

<sup>558</sup> Rennes MS 598, (fol. 89 recto b).



continued presence of (possibly) hereditary craftsmen at the ecclesiastical centre. It is difficult to say whether or not the composition of the Life preceded reintroduction of the new shrine. Both events, however, serve to promote the saint and his heritage in the turbulent twelfth-century period. Moreover, the evidence points to the perseverance of the small midlands foundation into the fourteenth or possibly early fifteenth century. It is possible that the shrine may have been brought on a circuit of the lands associated with Lann, as was commonplace in the twelfth century, and indeed afterward.<sup>559</sup> Though the extent of influence of Lann may have been confined largely to within ten or eleven miles of it,<sup>560</sup> there seems no reason why the officials of the community would not have brought the relics on a *cuairt*, or circuit. The primary function of the shrine and relics of Colmán, however, may have been to commemorate its founder in Lann, and to attract pilgrims to the church there.

### 1.2 The Thumb of Colmán

Besides the enshrinement of the corporeal remains of the saint, the thumb of Colmán is the only corporeal item singled out in the Life. It is stated to be kept in the house of the *comarba* of Colmán, Tech Conáin (§41). The Life tells us that the relic is in the tomb at the front of the abbot's house, and that every Sunday evening a service of angels is there. The dismembering of the bodies of the saints for the purposes of acquiring their relics does not appear to have been a common practice in Ireland, but there seems to have been a tradition of the saint removing his thumb, or toe, while living. In a note to the eighth of February in *Féilire Óengusso*,<sup>561</sup> a poet, Onchú, is noted as having demanded that Áedán, of Clúain Mór Máedóc, should cut off his little finger. The saint assents to this. Similarly, a note to the twenty-first of June mentions a resident of Durrow, Cormac, who demands the hand of Colum Cille as a relic. The saint removes his little finger instead.<sup>562</sup> In the case of *BCh*, no such explanation is given regarding the thumb of the saint, which is accorded no healing role in the Life. However the text notes that a choir of angels is in residence at Tech Conáineach night because of the relic, thus it appears to have held some importance in the twelfth century.

<sup>559</sup> Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', 17.

<sup>560</sup> See Chapter 5.4, 'Extent of the influence of Lann'.

<sup>561</sup> Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 70, note to Feb. 8.

<sup>562</sup> Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 156, note to Jun. 21.

## 2) *Associative Relics*

### 2.1 *Lann meic Luacháin*

While the role of the main church of Colmán, Lann, has been discussed more fully previously,<sup>563</sup> it is possible that the church itself, the saint's foundation (§29, 39, 53), may have functioned as an associative relic within the community of Lann. The very existence of the church would have served as a constant reminder of the role of the saint in the community, and most likely would have played a significant part in the lives of the local populace. Most saints' Lives portray them as founding, or building, their own churches.<sup>564</sup> Thus the saint leaves a clear reminder of his activities on the landscape.

### 2.2 *The puball of Colmán*

*BCh* records (§41) that Rath Cridi and Achad an Phubail are linked with the saint's *puball* 'tent'. The areas in question are identified by Walsh<sup>565</sup> as being in the area of Uí Dubáin, in which Lann was situated. The hagiographer affirms that no-one is entitled to anything of Tech Conáin, Rath Cridi or Achaid an Phubail except the *comarba* himself, and that these areas are free of taxation by king or chief or tribe. The *puball* of Colmán is part of the 'sacred landscape' of Lann and its environs. The Life informs us that the spot where the tent of the saint stood is worthy of devotion, and should not be subject to taxation.

### 2.3 *The bells of Colmán*

Two bells are mentioned in the text, the tongue-less bell of Motura and Mochuda (§27), and the *Findfaídech* 'Sweet-sounding One' of Colmán himself (§48, 49, 61). The former is claimed ultimately as a relic of Colmán, the relevant passage describing how the king of the Corco Baiscinn in south County Clare, with his followers, brought the bell to Colmán from Lismore. The bell originally belonged to Mochuta (§27). The Life states that these men of Corco Baiscinn are *isin ulaid fata ar cúl eclaise Cholmáin meic Lúacháin* 'in the long tomb at the back of the church of Colmán'. This incidental information indicates that the tomb and

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<sup>563</sup> Chapter 1.3, 'The Final Resting Place – Lann meic Luacháin'.

<sup>564</sup> See Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 149-152.

<sup>565</sup> Walsh, 'The Topography of *Betha Cholmáin*', 272.

associated bell are notable in Lann. The Life states of the bell that it was used in the making of covenants. Moreover, it was believed that washing from water contained in the bell could cure men and cattle of disease (§27). Belief in such relic functions was common in medieval Irish society. Regarding the swearing of oaths, Giraldus Cambrensis in the late twelfth century says of the Irish that ‘they fear to swear or perjure themselves in making oaths on these [the relics] much more than they do in swearing on the gospels’.<sup>566</sup> The healing qualities of bells are also attested in the sources. The Lives of Molaga<sup>567</sup> and Mac Creiche<sup>568</sup> feature instances in which the bell, or water from it, cures a third party. Similarly, the annals of Clonmacnoise relate how, upon the death of Ciarán, the grieving king Diarmait mac Cerbaill, deaf from woe, seeks advice from Colum Cille, who recommends the use of earth from Ciarán’s grave mixed with water in the ‘White Bell’.<sup>569</sup> While no property claims are directly connected with Motura’s bell in the Life of Colmán, a number of placenames are mentioned. One is *Adrad Motura* ‘Worship of Motura’, and the other is Tech Laisrén (§27). Both of these are described as being near Lann. It may be noteworthy that the bell belonged to Mochuda in the first instance, later being directly claimed by Lann for itself. It seems to function to affirm a friendly relationship between the two saints.<sup>570</sup>

The second bell, the *Findfaídech*, provides the author with an opportunity to detail meticulously property claimed by Lann (§48, 49). The bell is sent from heaven while Colmán is at Úachtar Comartha, in Uí Thigernáin, celebrating a mass to consecrate its church. The Life identifies a mark of the rim of the bell still visible upon a stone, and a clear stream where water spilled (§61). In this case, the claim is made that the church at Úachtar Comartha should be free from taxes.

A chronologically misplaced account of claims to wealth and property associated with the bell is recounted earlier in the Life (§48, 49). The bell’s significance in the Life is apparently considerable. It is used for curing, even to the extent that the son of the king of Fir Thulach,

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<sup>566</sup> O’Meara, *The First Version of the Topography of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, 100-101.

<sup>567</sup> Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 147.

<sup>568</sup> Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica Hibernici*, 83.

<sup>569</sup> AClon. s.a. 547, p 83.

<sup>570</sup> See *BCh* §18-24, 27.

Onchú mac Saráin,<sup>571</sup> is raised from the dead and rejuvenated (§48) when the saint pours three ‘waves’ of the *Findfaídech* over his head.<sup>572</sup> In a colloquy with the saint, after Onchú describes his visions of heaven, Colmán requests tribute from the prince *coná rab ar imreson* ‘lest it become a matter of strife’ (§49). What follows is a very detailed list of dues to Lann and Colmán, payable by the people of Dún na Cairce in Meath. According to the Life, every level of society must make some form of donation, be it food, livestock or clothing. Dún na Cairce has been identified by Walsh as being in the barony of Fir Thulach, three miles south of Lann.<sup>573</sup>

Colmán also promises Onchú *innreth t’innse tairis sin ní drónfat Gaill is Gaedil* ‘neither Norsemen nor Gael will invade thy island’ should three waves from the *Findfaídech* be cast against them (§49). Presumably, the island mentioned is Inis na Cairce on Lough Ennel. The Life notes that this was once a fortress of the Fir Thulach kings (§50), but that it was taken forcibly out of their possession by the Clann Cholmáin overlords in the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>574</sup> Thus, we may view the presence of the *Findfaídech*, kept presumably at Lann, as a protective relic of the saint. The hagiographer has written this protection into his construct of Colmán’s seventh-century career. The bell may not have given much protection to the Fir Thulach against the expanding Clann Cholmáin, but its efficacy against foreigners was probably perceived as a powerful testament, as no specific attack is recorded in the locality of Lough Ennel by the annals.<sup>575</sup> We may assume, however, that protection is forthcoming only upon receipt of full payment of the tribute promised by Onchú (§49). Thus the bell not only serves a protective role,<sup>576</sup> but acts as a constant reminder of what is due to

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<sup>571</sup> This Onchú is mentioned in AFM s.a. 660 as having fought in the battle of Ogamha(i)n against Blathmac mac Áedo Sláine.

<sup>572</sup> *Is cet duit érgi a súan báis a n-aóis bar .xxx., ar at senóir cetus anoisin* ‘Thou art at liberty to arise out of the sleep of death as thou wast at the age of thirty years; for now thou art an old man’.

<sup>573</sup> Walsh, ‘The Topography of *Betha Cholmán*’, 265.

<sup>574</sup> For further discussion see Chapter 5.2, ‘Lann and the Uí Néill’.

<sup>575</sup> However, the Viking devastation of near-by ecclesiastical centres is well documented, especially upon the arrival of Turgéis, recorded s.a. 845 in AU. This entry records the plundering of Connacht and Mide, and the burning of Clonmacnoise, Terryglas, Clonfert and other churches.

<sup>576</sup> The use of a relic of the saint as a protective battle talisman appears to have been common practice in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Lucas, ‘The Social Role of Relics’, 18. A battle-party may have brought a relic of their patron saint into battle, held before them as a standard to bring about a defeat of their opponents. The most famous such relic was undoubtedly the *Cathach*, or battle-psalter of Colum Cille, thought to have been written by the saint in the sixth century and enshrined in the eleventh. It is mentioned as still being in use as a

Lannto ensure that the benefits of its protection continue. Numerous other such protective battle-relics are mentioned as being in use in the hagiographer's twelfth-century era, including psalters,<sup>577</sup> bells<sup>578</sup> and staffs.<sup>579</sup> It appears that the *bachall* 'staff' of the saint was the most common of relics, both for protection in battle and the exacting of tribute. This is also true of the *BCh*.

#### 2.4 The *bachall* of Colmán

The *bachall* plays a large role in the Life. Notably, there is no direct reference to the *bachall* of Colmán being used with destructive force. As with other relics in the Life, the *bachall* is most often associated with some form of property or tribute claim. Having raised Onchú mac Saráin back to life with the *Findfaidech* (§49), Colmán blesses the land of Dún na Cairce. The people ask him for a well of fresh water, so he creates a well with his staff, which he claims will be famous *co mbráth* 'until Doom' (§50). The author here adds again to the 'sacred landscape' of the saint. Not only is this local well blessed by the saint, but it was formed by the power of his staff, 'the principal vehicle of his power, a kind of spiritual electrode'.<sup>580</sup> When the cleric rebuilds Port na hInse (§60), he traces his staff in a circle around the fort and it is restored to an even better form. When Colmán later destroys the fort (§68), and causes the island to sink, saintly prayer, rather than this staff, seems to be the instrument of the fort's destruction.

Another instance of the use of the *bachall* in the Life is far more local. Colmán immobilises a group of cows that had escaped, and were running towards their calves, by setting his staff upon the stone between the animals (§46). The Life recalls that the mark of the staff is still in the stone. Moreover, *BCh* states of the staff *Is sí-sin mind dlegar do bith a nÚib Forannán isna cellaib* 'that is a relic which should be in Uí Fhorannáin in the churches'. The very mark of the staff in the rock is indicative of the author's consolidation of the presence, and

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battle-talisman of the saint in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. E.g.: AU, AFM s.a. 1497, 1499; AFM s.a. 1567.

<sup>577</sup> E.g. the *cathach* of Saint Iarlaithe, ATig, CS s.a. 1130.

<sup>578</sup> E.g. the bell of Saint Patrick, ATig s.a. 1166.

<sup>579</sup> E.g. the staff of Ciarán, CS s.a. 1083.

<sup>580</sup> Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', 8.

influence, of Colmán in the area. The name of this *bachall* is also given in this episode. Before the incident it was called the *mac bachall* ‘staff of the boys’, whereas afterwards it is named as the *bachall bís eter na bú ocus na laegu* ‘staff that is between the cows and the calves’.

Another *bachall* of Colmán is the *bachlach cochlach* ‘hooded staff’. This seems inextricably linked with Colmán Elo. It is first mentioned when both Colmánas make an exchange of staffs having returned from Rome (§83). In this episode, it appears that Colmán Elo, rather than Colmán mac Luacháin, differentiates the staffs by tying dark blue swathes of cloth around his own. Colmán mac Luacháin questions the practicality of this, and is told that *nem dontí dogéna secht mbroit dí amail caithfes íatt* ‘heaven shall be granted to any who makes seven cloaks for the staff’. Later in the Life the staff seems quite directly associated with Colmán mac Luacháin, with no mention of Colmán Elo. In this case, the king, Conall Guthbinn, seeks aid against an attacking army from the saint (§91). The saint instructs the king to carry the staff as a battle-talisman, stating that it would make the enemy believe that Conall’s force was three times greater than its actual number. The author also describes how each of Conall’s small force tied a cloak-string onto the staff and raised it above his head like a hood, hence the name ‘hooded staff’.

The use of the staff as a battle talisman is not unusual. The *bachall Íosa* ‘staff of Jesus’, associated with the *comarba* of Saint Patrick, is reported as having been carried into battle against Flann mac Conaing, king of Brega, by Áed Findliath mac Néill, king of Tara in the ninth century.<sup>581</sup> More contemporary with the composition of *BCh* is an instance at the battle of Corann, Co. Sligo, where the *bachall* of Ciarán was reportedly pressed into service by Ruadhrí Úa Conchobhair against the Conmaicne.<sup>582</sup> It seems likely that the *bachall cochlach* potentially occupied a parallel role in the Uí Dubáin community.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> AU and Fragmentary Annals s.a. 868.

<sup>582</sup> CS s.a. 1083.

<sup>583</sup> For further discussion on the role of Colmán Elo in *BCh*, see Chapter 4.2, ‘Lann and Its Ecclesiastical Neighbours’.

## 2.5 The reilic of Colmán

The *reilic* ‘cemetery’ of Lann seems also to have functioned as a type of reliquary.<sup>584</sup> Those buried in the cemetery could hope to rise with the saint on the last day. Lann certainly provided good odds for those lucky enough to be buried at the cemetery, for *BCh* (§11, 29) asserts that a mere one out of every hundred interred would fail to enter the kingdom of heaven. A fee, or donation, for the privilege of being buried near the corporeal remains of the patron, would doubtless have been required. If Colmán’s reputation alone was not sufficient to attract local burial dues, the hagiographer asserts that numerous saints shared burial rights at the site (§42). By publicly allocating a certain amount of the cemetery to the monks of Fursa, Conchraid, Colmán Elo, Colmán Comraire and Etchén, and acquiring reciprocal rights, anyone who chose to be buried at Lann could feel satisfied that they were, by extension, also being buried with those saints. This concept is expanded further as the author discusses the division of the cemetery in three, the first thirds allocated to Fursa and Etchén, the final third allocated to all the other saints of Ireland who had been at the council of Druimm Cett (§42). A curious detail adds that the portion allocated to Fursa and Etchén would be around their *ulaid*: *an tríán imon ulaid Fursae la Fursae féin ⁊ an tríán iman ulaid epscuip Etchén la epscop Etchén féin*. The term *ulaid* / *ailed*, in this context seems to mean a flag-stone or monument or penitential station dedicated to the saint in question, rather than an actual grave.<sup>585</sup> That there may have been a site marker dedicated to these figures suggests a real tradition of their commemoration at Lann. The same may be said for *Cross Fursai* ‘Fursa’s Cross’ there (§97). The claim by the author is not that other saints were buried at Lann, but rather that their association allows Lann a greater status. It is stated outright in the Life that any monks or clerics wishing to visit these cemeteries may count the journey as a pilgrimage, with all the honour and blessing that this entails (§42).

The process of swearing oaths in the cemetery of a monastic foundation, as portrayed in *BCh* (§42), has been linked with pre-Christian roots. Lucas points out:

‘if it was true, as Geraldus Cambrensis says, that the cult of relics was conspicuously developed among the Welsh and Irish, this may have been

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<sup>584</sup> See Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 154-156.

<sup>585</sup> *DIL ailed*, A col. 114.

due to the fact that swearing on the graves of the dead was especially characteristic of the Celtic-speaking peoples so that they were predisposed, when Christianised, to continue the practice in a suitably modified form, utilising the relics of the saints'.<sup>586</sup>

While this may indeed have elements of truth in it, we have seen in our discussion of the miracles of Colmán that it is difficult to say whether there are any pre-Christian connotations to be found in the Life. There is mention of Óengus mac ind Óc being invoked (§86), but this may represent a popular folklore motif, rather than a specifically pre-Christian element. It is likely that the tradition of swearing oaths at cemeteries, should it have survived into later Christian practices, became wholly Christianised.

The author further adds to his depiction of the prestige of Lann's cemetery by adding that holy soil from Rome is available there. The Life recounts how Colmán, on his return from pilgrimage (§77), brings with him sacks of the soil from the tomb of Peter *ocus úir leptha cech apstail ele oculus cech ardnaeim fil isin Róim dochum hÉrend* 'and earth of the tomb of every other apostle and of every great saint that is in Rome to Ireland'. This is destined to be spread around the cemetery at Lann, thereby ensuring that anyone wishing to be buried there could rest easy, assured of rising on the last day in the company of the saints and martyrs of the holy city.<sup>587</sup> *BCh* continues to recount how Colmán's mother, Lassar, steals some of this soil (§82), which she brings to her relatives, the Uí Guill and the Uí Dimma. Her son promptly retrieves the soil and returns it to Lann.

While much attention is paid to the cemetery of Lann, little or no mention is made of bringing the relics on a *cuairt* 'circuit'. It has been suggested by Lucas that relics in general represented a portable version of the cemetery of the saint, that people who could not make the journey to the site of pilgrimage could still avail of the sanctity and healing powers of the relics, perhaps for a price, every few years when they were brought on this *cuairt*. It seems that Lann places more emphasis on pilgrimage to the church and its cemetery. If this be the

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<sup>586</sup> Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', 25.

<sup>587</sup> See C. Doherty, 'The use of relics in early Ireland' in M. Richter and P. Ní Catháin (eds.), *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984) 89-104, at 99.



case, it is probable that there was less need for the relics to make a circuit of the areas that came under the influence of Lann, as these were all in very close proximity, making the church and community of Colmán readily accessible to its community.<sup>588</sup> Moreover, given Lann's relatively modest influence in the medieval period, it may be unrealistic to expect documentary evidence of the relics being brought on a *cuairt* to survive.

It seems most likely that the Lann sought to attract the rulers of local groups to be buried in its *reilic*. These local groups, with whom Colmán often claims kinship, were the Uí Fhorrannáin, the Uí Máel Umai, the Uí Mancháin, the Uí Lechet and the Meic Airechtaigh.<sup>589</sup> The combination of increased prestige through association with other saintly figures, the soil of Rome and increased chances of entering heaven, may have been seen by the rulers of these groups as attractive factors, convincing them to be buried at Lann, rather than other, nearby influential centres, such as Rahan and Clonard.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> For a discussion on this see Chapter 5.4, 'Extent of the Influence of Lann'.

<sup>589</sup> See Map 2/7 – Local Family Groupings Mentioned in *BCh*.

<sup>590</sup> For further discussion on patronage by local kings, see Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, 196-202.

### *Summary*

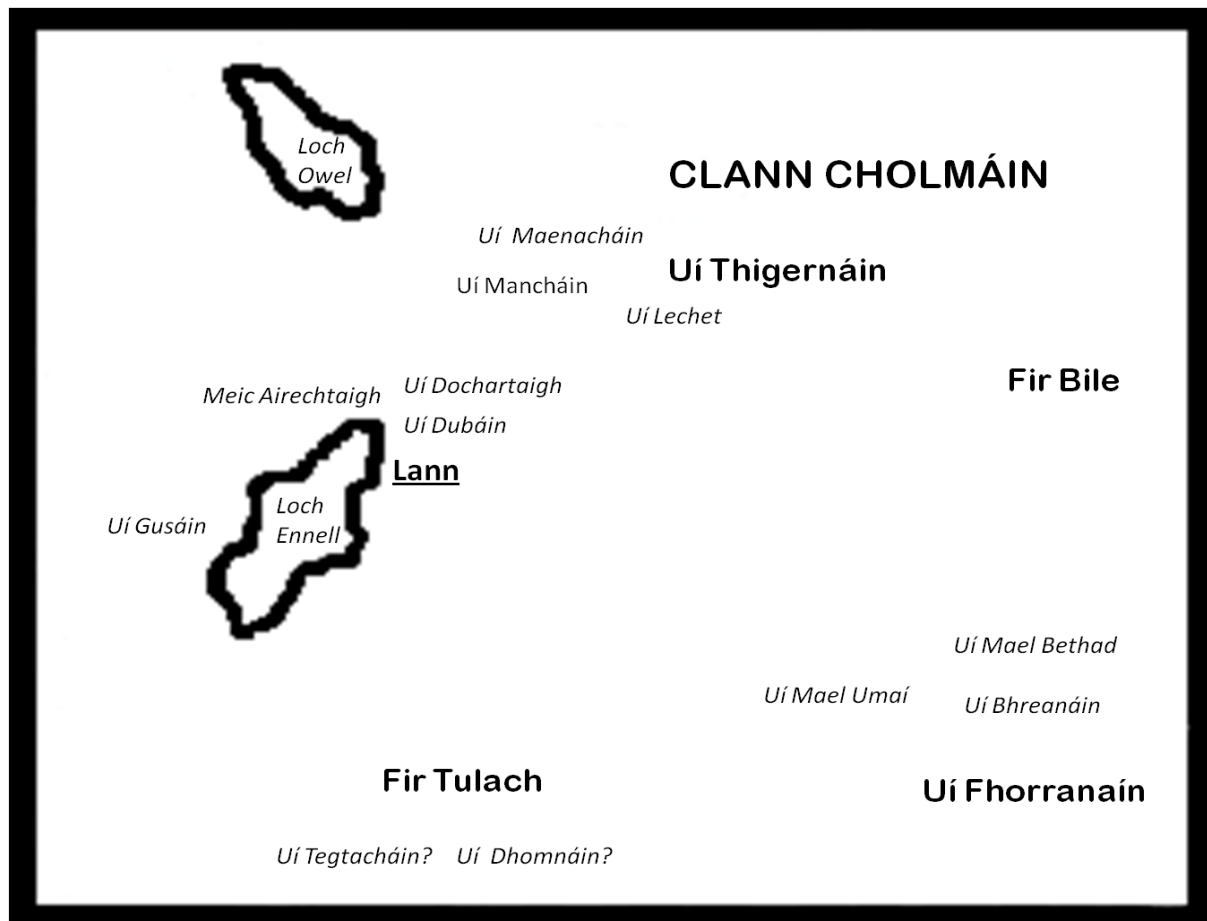
The author carefully creates a picture of the locality connected to the saint, and strengthens Colmán's associations with this locality, by mentioning the ways in which traces of the relics are still apparent on the landscape. In some cases, such as that of Colmán's thumb, the relic itself is still in evidence. All of the foregoing serves to link the saint closely with his locality, to enhance the relationship between the saint, his church and the land itself, so that when the laity see a certain rock, or mark on a rock, an association with Colmán comes to mind. The reading aloud of sections of the Life on the saint's feast-day(s) serves to remind the public of its benefits from, and obligations to, the saint.

While it may fit neatly with the author's general *modus operandi* throughout the Life to say that every relic serves property or wealth-based ends, the evidence in the Life does not fully bear out this conclusion. The majority of the episodes in the Life which feature a relic do indeed mention wealth, or property. However, it seems likely that the inclusion of these details also has the purpose of magnification of the image and cult of the saint. Lann is presented as an active monastic centre, aware of its environs and limitations, demanding much tribute in certain cases, but also attempting to strengthen its position in its surrounding society.

## 6.2 Lann and its community

*Tíagait immurgu muinnter Laindi etersacart<sup>7</sup> airchindech ar cend Fursa.*

‘However, the community of Lann, both priest and *airchinnech*, go out to meet Fursa.’ (§98)



**Map 8: Local family groupings mentioned in BCh**

Incidental information in the Life may add further details to our picture of Lann's community.

We are told in the Life that the first successor of Colmán, was Cúanu (or Cúanna) mac Cummaíne, the nephew of Colmán (§37, 38). The son of Cúanna was Airechtach, who succeeded his father as *airchinnech* of Lann (§19, 37), and to whom Colmán eventually

bequeaths his guesthouse upon his death-bed (§100).<sup>591</sup> The Life informs us that the Uí Airechtaigh, or descendants of Airechtach, were hereditary *airchinnigh* of Lann (§37). However, this is most likely to be the eleventh or twelfth-century view of Lann's structure being projected into a seventh-century setting. The position of *airchinnech* becomes common after the eighth century at the earliest.<sup>592</sup> Whether the previously mentioned Giolla Críst mac Giolla Pátraic in the fourteenth century was of the line of Airechtach is difficult to say, given that he is not mentioned in the genealogies nor indeed any other source that I can find. However, the Life indicates that in twelfth-century Lann, the position of *airchinnech* was hereditary.<sup>593</sup>

Other data in the Life allows us to form a more complete picture of the offices of Lann and its daughter churches, as perceived in the twelfth century. These are shown in *Fig. 12* following.

*Fig 12 – Offices of Lann and its Community mentioned in BCh*<sup>594</sup>

family	position	Area
Uí Dubáin	<i>fine griein</i>	Lann
	land-owning family	Fir Thulach
	<i>goibhne</i> <sup>595</sup>	Lann
Uí Maíl Bethad	smiths	

<sup>591</sup> Though the text (§100) here notes that Airechtach is the son of Muiredach, not Cúana. This is likely to be a variant tradition.

<sup>592</sup> See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 102 and Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 223.

<sup>593</sup> Cf. the Uí Clucáin, who held the offices of *comarba* 'successor' and *fer léiginn* 'lector', and the Mac Rechtaicán, who held the office of *fosairchinnech* 'resident superior / administrator' at Kells in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 98-103.

<sup>594</sup> *BCh* also makes mention of the position of *abad* in the community of Lann (§41) but does not associate a family grouping with this title or mention any individuals to whom it may have been ascribed. The more common term throughout the text is *airchinnech*.

<sup>595</sup> Hereditary families of craftsmen seem to have been a feature of eleventh- and twelfth-century monastic organisation. Cf. the Mac Áeda at Kells, of whom Sittric mac meic Áeda is noted as having built a new shrine for the *Cathach* of Colum Cille towards the end of the eleventh century. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, 93. Anníaraid, the craftsman of Lann mentioned in the Life (§40, 41) is referred to as the *cerd* (*DIL C cerd* (1) a col. 139), while the Uí Bréanáin and the Uí Maíl Bethad are referred to as *goibhne* 'smiths' (See *gobae*, *DIL G* col. 127), which suggests a clear distinction between the artisan *cerd* and the more basic metal-working *gobae*

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	<i>ferthigis</i>	Uí Fhorranáin
	<b>stewards</b>	(eastern community)
Uí Dochartaigh	<i>ferthigis</i>	Lann
	<b>stewards</b>	
	<i>goibhne</i>	Lann
Uí Bréanáin	<b>smiths</b>	
	<i>ferthigis</i>	Uí Fhorranáin
	<b>stewards</b>	(eastern community)
Meic Airechtaigh	<i>airchinnech</i>	Tech Conáin
	<b>chief administrator</b>	Lann

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The Uí Dubáin are acknowledged by the author as being the *fine griein* of Lann, or family to which the land originally belonged.<sup>596</sup> This was on account of their donation of a tract of land to Colmán upon which Lann was founded (§39). It seems likely that craftsmen were important to Lann and the surrounding community. Anniraid has an important role in the Life and is described as being a craftsman from Tech Conáin (§40, 41). This latter monastic house at Lann is also mentioned as being home to the abbot of Lann (§41) and supposedly houses a relic of the saint – his thumb. The office of steward, or *ferthigis*, of Lann, is assigned to the Uí Dochartaigh, descended from Dochartach, son of Crob Criad (§71, 72). This latter figure was described as the steward of Saint Áedán of Ferns, who was raised from the dead by Colmán, apparently prompting the removal of the family to Lann. *BCh* names two family groups as both *ferthigis* and *goibhne* (§45). The Uí Máelbethad are claimed to have been in residence in Lann's eastern community, in an area called Tulach Lonáin in Uí Fhorranáin as

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<sup>596</sup> For information on the relationship between the *fine griein* and the patron saint, see Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam: The Patron-Saint of an Irish Church', 269-271.

stewards (§45), but also as smiths at Lann, suggesting that there were numerous smiths working in the community of Colmán. The Life notes the Uí Bréanáin in a similar dual role (§45). No evidence is suggested by *BCh* to elucidate whether these two family groups shared both roles at the same time, or whether they may have functioned in their roles at differing times. The sharing of two positions by one family group may suggest the limited personnel resources available to a small monastic institution.

In each of the cases above it is likely that the author was representing his twelfth-century surroundings more accurately than a seventh-century reality. It is possible that the organisation of the monastic site as described by the author in the Life remained relatively unchanged until the burning of the site in 1394.<sup>597</sup> The singular historical attestation of an *abb* of the site in the tenth century does not reveal much.<sup>598</sup> However, together with some information in the life likely to represent twelfth-century reality, and a number of later references, one of which was written by a redactor of the Life in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, a somewhat clearer picture of the organisation of Lann emerges up to the seventeenth century, sketching an outline of the history of the community at Lann for the better part of a millennium.

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<sup>597</sup> MIA.

<sup>598</sup> AFM s.a. 929

### 6.3 A Summary of the history of Lann

Drawing together all the foregoing evidence from *BCh* and historical sources, it is possible to provide the following outline of Lann's history.

Century	Details
7 <sup>th</sup> (Probably)	Lann meic Luacháin is founded. The founder's relics remain at Lann
9 <sup>th</sup>	In the middle of the century the relics are hidden away to protect them from theft or destruction by the Vikings.
10 <sup>th</sup>	Máel Brigde mac Feadacáin, abbot of Lann dies in 929 (AFM)
12 <sup>th</sup>	The relics of Colmán are re-introduced to the community at Lann. The shrine is repaired by Giolla Críst Ua Mocháin. A new Life of the patron saint is composed from previous traditions and newer material. Giolla Críst mac Giolla Pátraic is <i>airchinnech</i> of Lann. Tuathail mac Giolla Coluim is priest.
13 <sup>th</sup> / 14 <sup>th</sup>	Lann becomes a parish under the deanery of Mullingar, and is subject to taxation by it.
14 <sup>th</sup>	The church at Lann is burned, along with the relics of Colmán, in 1394 by Muirchertach Óg mac Eochagáin. Thomas Carpentere is principal clergyman. He dies in 1400.

**15th – 17<sup>th</sup>**

Principal clergyman are John Mulgan (†1422), **Record Missing**, Edward Darcy (†1562), **Record Missing**, John Mountfield (†1622), Alexander Bailey (†1637), Thomas Carter (†1639), Edmund Burke (†1666)

**17<sup>th</sup>**

Lann becomes amalgamated with Moyliscar and Carrick c. 1666



## Conclusion

*... araile scél forathmentur sund... co mbráth...*

We are indeed lucky that Christophe-Paul de Robien was an enthusiastic manuscript collector, and that he took an interest in an Irish manuscript containing largely religious material; however it reached France, the manuscript, along with the copy of *BCh* contained therein, might otherwise have been lost. It is hoped that the foregoing work has illustrated that *BCh* is more than a compendium of property claims, more than a repository of political information and claims to wealth, indeed, more than the biography of a saint. Further, it is hoped that a method for reading *BCh* can be suggested. By identifying, as fully as possible, a date of composition, together with as many of the place-names as possible, and noting some of the numerous hagiographical conventions used in the text, the Life may begin to reveal its less immediate data.

Accepting that *BCh* is not biography, but rather a window into the contemporary concerns of Lann, allows the reader to engage more readily with the text, and perhaps to understand more easily its apparent inconsistencies. Textual inconsistencies or inaccuracies are not to be immediately viewed as flaws; rather, it may be asked why the hagiographer chose to include such materials? This method of questioning can help to go beyond that which is historical, providing insight into the psychology and political and social interactions of the period. The Life reveals Lann and its community as a microcosm of the midlands. The length of the text allowed for far more information to be recorded than in some other hagiographical Lives. As such, a level of detail is provided about the political relations, property extent, tributary concerns and spiritual role of a church, which in the wider context remained largely inconsequential, than has hitherto been available for most ecclesiastical sites in the midlands.

The text reflects the process of its reception and mediation to its intended public. Careful reading of both the poetry and prose of *BCh* may provide evidence that at least sections of the text were meant to be read aloud or performed to an audience. While it has been accepted as convention that the Life of a saint was read aloud on his feast day, it is possible that thematic sections of *BCh* were used as part of a sermon at the church of Lann. Locative phrases such

as *i fus* and *sund* support this, while a number of phrases in the first plural seem to suggest audience inclusion. It is also a possibility that some of the verse sections in the text may have been sung as hymns by a church congregation in memory of the saint. The possible performance of sections of *BCh* sets it within a wider context of the oral reception of literature in the medieval period.

Taking internal information from *BCh* and comparing it with other literary, historical, and archaeological sources, it is possible to provide a far more detailed history of Lann meic Luacháin than has been previously available. Assuming the foundation of Lann in the seventh century, one can trace the church through the eighth- and nine-century Viking incursions, eleventh- and twelfth-century political and ecclesiastical upheavals, the fourteenth-century destruction of the church, and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century later history, before Lann's incorporation within the Deanery of Mullingar. It is also possible to infer that there was a culture of active metal-working and craftsmanship in the area.

The hagiographer of *BCh* brings his subject into contact with other local saints, as well as far more influential figures of the midlands. By locating the saint in such prestigious company, Colmán is invested with a spiritual authority above and beyond that which he would possess by himself, which in turn lends authority to the claims of Lann over property and wealth. By carefully studying the relationships between each of the ecclesiastical figures presented in *BCh*, and in turn their relationship with Colmán, the hitherto unknown ecclesiastical affiliations of Lann may be revealed, as well as the hagiographical sources with which the author was familiar. It seems likely that Lann sought to ally itself politically with Rahan and with Lismore, while the relationship with Clonmacnoise does not appear to have been cordial. The author appears to have been familiar with the traditions of Mochuda, as well as those of Colmán Elo, Colmán Comraire, Moling and Áedán. It is possible that he mistakes Fursa of Meath for Fursa of Péronne, but in general the hagiographer seems to be well informed of his hagiographical sources and traditions.

Perhaps the core findings of this thesis are those which illuminate the close relationship of Lann with its local secular rulers, and how the church interacted within this local society. It is likely that the information provided by comparing the evidence of *BCh* with that of historical and archaeological sources reflects the situations and relationships of similar smaller church

communities in the midlands during the medieval period. Unfortunately, evidence for most of these is no longer extant. Luckily, the wealth of material found in *BCh* provides a valuable guide to the overall role of a smaller church in its society. *BCh*'s portrayal of Lann and Fir Thulach suggests a close relationship of mutual benefit. Aspects of religion, taxation, law, landscape, inauguration ceremonies and local traditions are interwoven in *BCh* to demonstrate Lann's clear dependence on its immediate secular community, and also how this community may have viewed its church. One cannot be mentioned without the other. As such, *BCh* describes the relationship between a small church and its community in far greater detail than is to be found in most other hagiographical texts. Further to Paul Walsh's work on the placenames of *BCh*, the geographical area of concern of Lann has been traced and mapped. This visibly demonstrates that Lann's area of concern extended at most to about fifteen miles.

*BCh* contains a great deal of information on the secular politics of the midlands unavailable in other sources. Close reading of the text adds significantly to our knowledge of local tribes and rulers, and their interactions with their overlords, when added to existing historical and archaeological knowledge. The Life's close attention to concerns of property has led to the inclusion of dozens of place-names in the text. Many of these may be located in modern nomenclature. Of those which are not, a good approximation may often be made. Thus, *BCh* serves as a large repository of onomastic information not attested in other sources. The Life also notes the seven churches founded by Colmán. Identifying locations, or most likely locations, of these churches presents a clear picture of the extent of Lann's *paruchia*, as well as providing some insight into what tributes may have been due to them. It is hoped that the mapping of some of these churches and placenames, together with the mapping of the local population groups therein will shed new light on this closely-knit community. Not only does the Life provide us with information on smaller population groups local to the area, but also denotes what positions some of these groups may have had within the church community at Lann. While some of the offices described in *BCh* are conventional, others are less common and others still were positions shared by one family. While much documentation is in evidence for larger groups, mapping such detailed information provides an ever-deeper understanding of the medieval midlands.

At the outset it has been mentioned that Irish hagiography had its own conventions and motifs, but that it had largely developed from a Continental tradition. If this thesis has been a close inspection of a small church and its society, then widening the camera angle can now set this local and specific hagiographic text in a far wider context. The hagiographer of *BCh* was far from revolutionary, though he may well have been ingenious. The preceding work opened with general comments on hagiography. It now seems appropriate to do the same at the finish. Writing of hagiography and the cult of a saint, Julia M. H. Smith has noted the following:

‘So saint making was a delicate business. Varied in its impetus, unpredictable in its outcome, and potentially controversial, it constituted one of the ways in which early-medieval Christianity blurred the distinction between life and death, time and eternity. A successful cult brought heavenly power down to earth. An unsuccessful one vanished, leaving minimal trace ... [S]aints and their cults in 1100 were not the same as they had been in 600, whether in discourse, image, liturgy or action... “Practised but not taught,” saints and their cults remained capable of endless reinvention: the attribution of sanctity remained rooted in the needs of living communities to find holiness in their midst in ways which made sense of the world’.<sup>599</sup>

And so the historicity of Colmán is not the point, but rather how his Life served the community of Lann. However small, that the cult remained active for the better part of a thousand years is testament to the vibrancy of that populace. *BCh*, and the memory of its local society, might all too easily have ‘vanished, leaving minimal trace’. However, we are lucky that this hagiographical record exists, reflecting not only the local concerns of close-knit Lann, but also those of the wider sphere of saints, their cults, and their communities.

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<sup>599</sup> Smith, ‘Saints and their Cults’, 595 and 605.

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